OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

EVERCADE VS REVEALED!

HOW DOES BLAZE'S NEW CONSOLE IMPROVE ON ITS HANDHELD LEGACY?

THE EVOLUTION OF IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

AGENT DENNIS CASWELL RETURNS TO EPYX'S CLASSIC 8-BIT SPY CAPER

THE HISTORY OF R-TYPE

DESIGNER KAZUMA KUJO REVISITS IREM'S LEGENDARY SHOOT-'EM-UP FRANCHISE

PLUS: GRANZELLA'S R-TYPE FINAL 2

REINVENTING MONSTER WORLD IV

RYUICHI NISHIZAWA ON THE 16-BIT CULT GEM AND THE NEW REMAKE

ULTIMATE GUIDE: DONKEY KONG JR

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NINTENDO'S CUTE ARCADE SEQUEL

THE MAKING OF X-MEN LEGENDS

THE INSIDE STORY ON RAVEN'S SUPERHEROIC ACTION RPG

ULTIMATE GUIDE: POWER STONE

HOW CAPCOM REINVENTED THE ARCADE BEAT-'EM-UP

THE HISTORY OF ROLAND

DISCOVER HOW AMSTRAD CREATED ITS 8-BIT MASCOT

PLUS ATARI 7800 **STAR FOX** LOCK 'N' CHASE **CELESTE** NINJA GAIDEN BLACK **BALANCE OF POWER** RECKLESS RUFUS

FUTURE
LOAD 220

retrosix GAME BOY® ADVANCE PRESTIGE

Our Prestige Edition consoles are fully armed with every single upgrade in hardware we have designed to date.

Hand-restored to it's original condition, with a new shell, buttons, screen and power switch. Then finally professionally boxed making the perfect gift for a die-hard gamer.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE R-TYPE MEMORY?

DARRAN JONES

Playing *R-Type Delta* and feeling overjoyed that one of my favourite franchises had successfully made the jump to 3D.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, a SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Mr Driller: Drill Land*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

I played *R-Type* on the Amiga and remember being impressed with the graphics. I didn't like having to press the space bar to eject the Force, but my joystick only had one button, so what are you going to do?
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
Currently playing: *Marvel Puzzle Quest*
Favourite game of all time: *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*

NICK THORPE

The giant battleship stage is always impressive, but *R-Type Final*'s take on it blew me away all over again with that city scene and the dramatic music.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Sonic Adventure*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

I've only played *R-Type* on the ZX Spectrum and the main thing I remember was being prompted to put the key bindings in at the start
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord...* Modded of course
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

DAVID CROOKES

I've not played Irem's game much, but I always remember being impressed by the charge mechanic. It felt quite novel at the time.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Oddworld: Soulstorm*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

PAUL DRURY

I first played *R-Type* on my C64 and I liked it so my favourite moment is when I then played it in the arcade and realised how brilliant it actually was.
Expertise: *Q*Bert*'s potty mouth
Currently playing: *Hitchhiker*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

GRAEME MASON

Seeing those amazing Spectrum screenshots of the original game in *Crash* magazine before marvelling at the game itself. A technical marvel by Bob Pape.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Galencia*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

RORY MILNE

It's the obvious choice, but watching the Dobkeratops scroll into view in the arcade original never gets old. I still remember my first sighting being a genuine WTF moment.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Summer Games*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

MARTYN CARROLL

It has to be the third stage of the original arcade game, when your R-9A is dwarfed by the huge warship boss that *is* the stage.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Oddworld: Soulstorm*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

LOADING...

I can still remember the first time I played Irem's *R-Type*. It was in a small arcade next to an indoor market in Poole and it was wedged in between a couple of cabs, one of which was *Double Dragon*. It had a unique aesthetic style that immediately separated it from other shooters I had played and I quickly fed the new cab some money.

It didn't take long for me to lose my available ships, but I fed more cash in, impressed by the novel charge system and the great and varied power-ups you could collect. Eventually I was able to reach the boss we now know as Dobkeratops and what a marvellous monstrosity it was. Irem's game had a distinct biomechanical style that immediately reminded me of the *Alien* films and facing that disgustingly ugly boss cemented that thought further.

I played *R-Type* many times over the following years and it was one of the main reasons that I took up karate, because it was the sole arcade machine found in the bar next to the hall we practised in and I would play it religiously and could clear the first four levels on a single credit (I can't do that now). I'd typically be surrounded by others while I played and they were always impressed by the imposing mothership found on *R-Type*'s third stage, and also this issue's cover.

It's a real honour then to not only quiz Kazuma Kujo about the original game, but also the many titles that followed, including the latest game in the series, *R-Type Final 2*. Enjoy the article and don't forget to check out our new subs offer on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine!

CONTENTS

>> Load 220 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

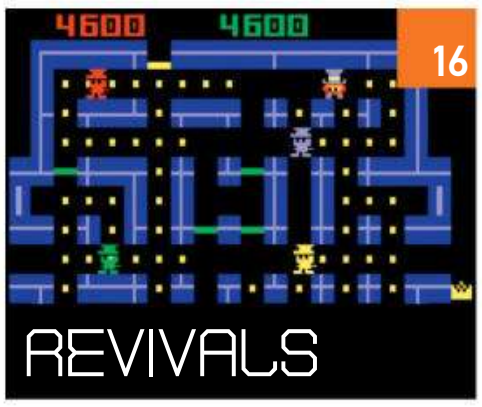
06 Masters In History
Dominik Diamond tells us about his brand-new book devoted to his time on *GamesMaster*

08 Iain Lee
He's been toying with the idea, but Iain's finally sold off some of his retro consoles. Will he regret it, though?

10 Mr Biffo
Paul remembers when we just needed our fertile imaginations in order to power our videogames

12 A Moment With
Andrew Byatt stops by to tell us about the next evolution of the Evercade, including a new console and several new carts

14 Back To The Noughties
It's July 2004 and Nick witnesses the first shots of the new handheld war as the PSP and DS are unveiled

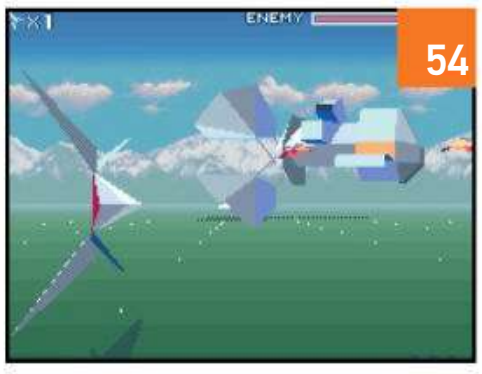


16 Lock 'N' Chase
Nick recalls one of his favourite games from the Intellivision collection he bought in 2013

54 Star Fox
Darran remembers splashing out a small fortune for Nintendo's ambitious shooter

84 NFL 2K
Nick has wasted a lot of time on Visual Concept's excellent sports game

98 Ninja Gaiden Black
Darran explains why he loves Team Ninja's incredible slash-'em-up



36 The Making Of: Reckless Rufus
Find out why developer Mike Berry wanted his budget game to be a little different

38 The History Of: Roland
Discover how Amstrad used a selection of games with nothing in common to create a new hero for its CPC range of computers

46 Hardware Heaven: Atari 7800
We take a brief look at Atari's follow-up to its 5200 console

56 The Making Of: Balance Of Power
Chris Crawford takes us behind the scenes of his politically-charged strategy game

60 The Unconverted
Nick trawls dusty forgotten arcades and highlights the games that never made it into your home

70 Peripheral Vision: Amiga CD32 Controller
It might not have been around for long, but Amiga's console had a decent controller

72 From The Archives: Eidos
Dominic Wheatley and Ian Livingstone CBE recall how Domark transformed into a brand-new games publisher

76 Classic Moments: Twisted Metal: World Tour
Nick's been having a lot of fun revisiting this. What key scenes do you remember?

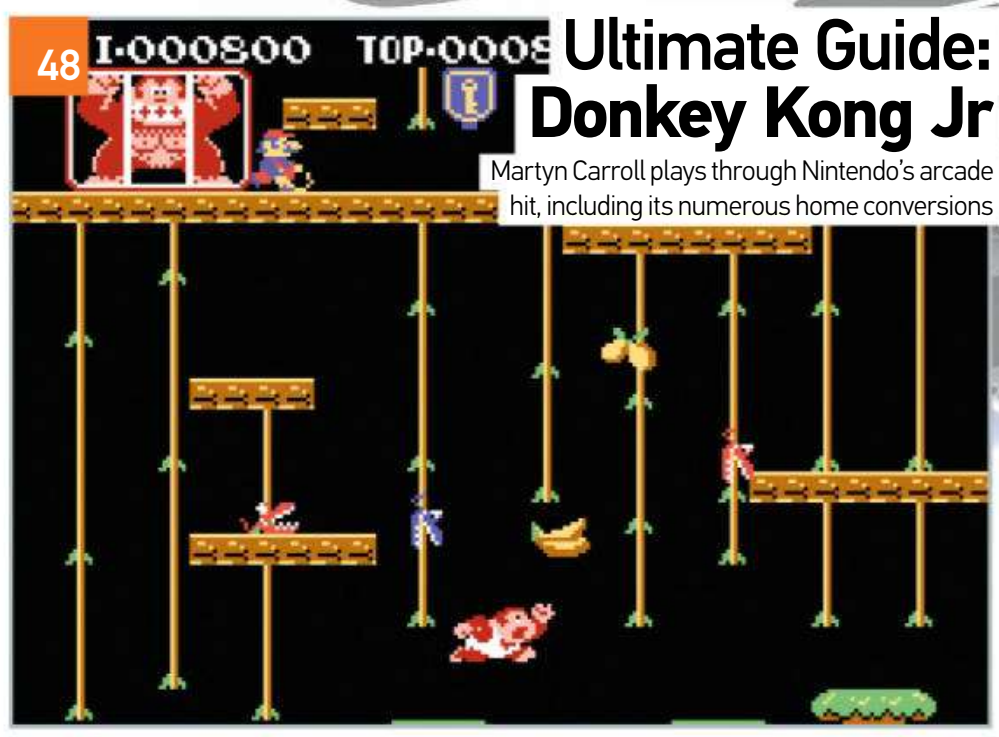
86 The Making Of: X-Men Legends
Aaron Potter quizzes the team behind Raven Software's slick superhero-fuelled RPG

90 Future Classic: Celeste
Paul Walker-Emig makes a strong case for this charming, but rather hardcore platformer

92 In The Chair: David Thiel
The pinball wizard on breaking into the industry and teaching Q*bert to swear

The History Of R-Type

Kazuma Kujo guides us through the biomechanical shooter series and reveals what's in store for the long-awaited sequel



Ultimate Guide: Donkey Kong Jr

Martyn Carroll plays through Nintendo's arcade hit, including its numerous home conversions

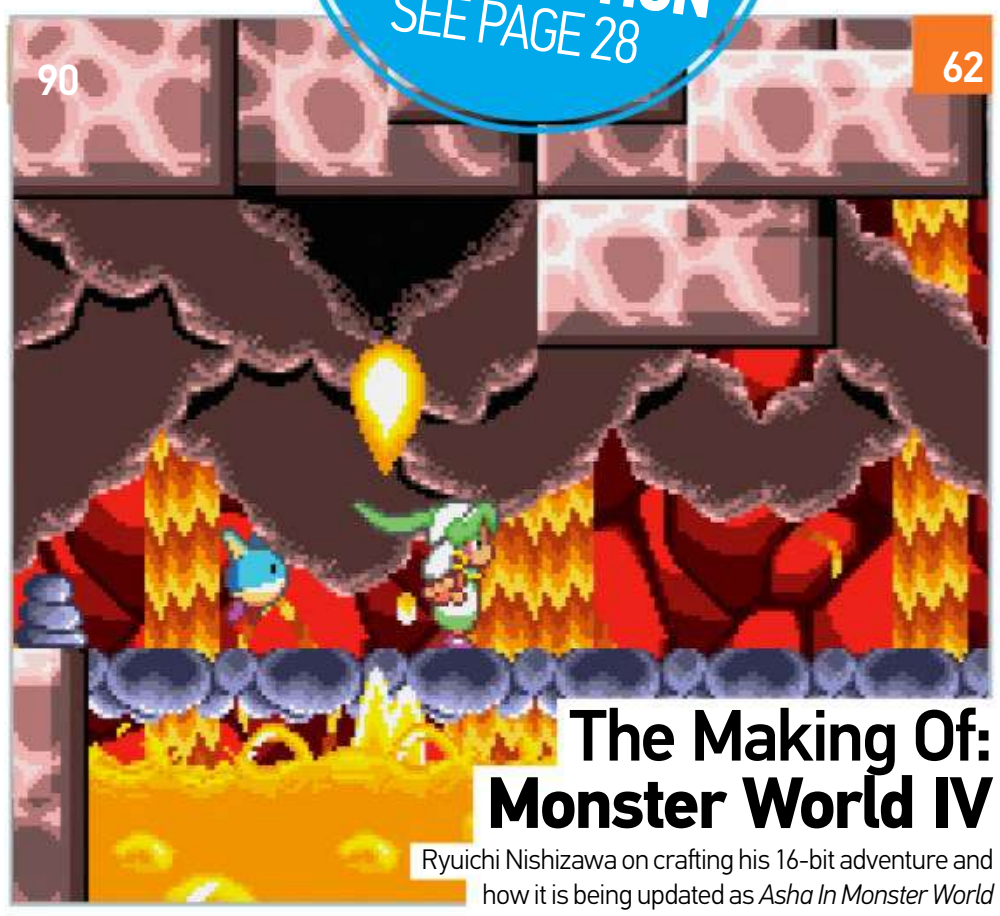
Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | Retro Gamer Magazine | @RetroGamerMag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

FREE GIFT
SUBSCRIPTION
SEE PAGE 28

The Evolution Of: Impossible Mission

Dennis Caswell and other agents give us a classified debriefing on Epyx's popular spy-based platformer



The Making Of: Monster World IV

Ryuichi Nishizawa on crafting his 16-bit adventure and how it is being updated as *Asha In Monster World*

Ultimate Guide: Power Stone

REVIEWS

100 Evercade Multi Game Cartridges
102 Pac-Man 99
102 RetroMania Wrestling
102 Arcade Retro Classics
102 Alice And You In The Planet Of Numbers

ESSENTIALS

28 **Subscriptions**
More exciting than defeating *R-Type*'s gargantuan mothership

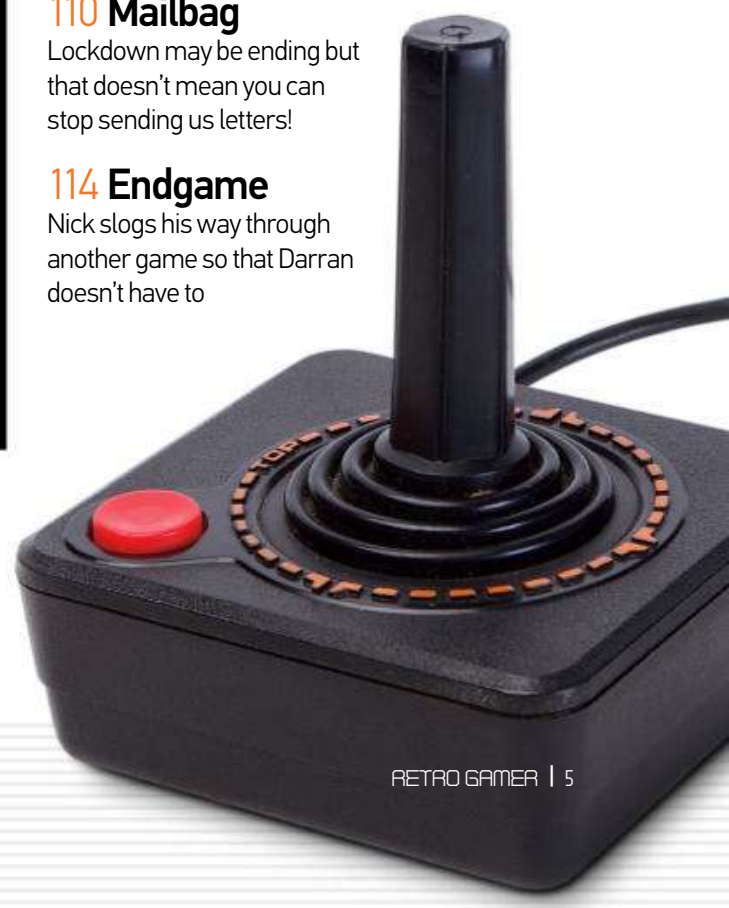
104 **Hot Topic: Sony's Digital Store Closures**
Tim, Nick and Darran discuss what happens when classic games are removed from digital stores

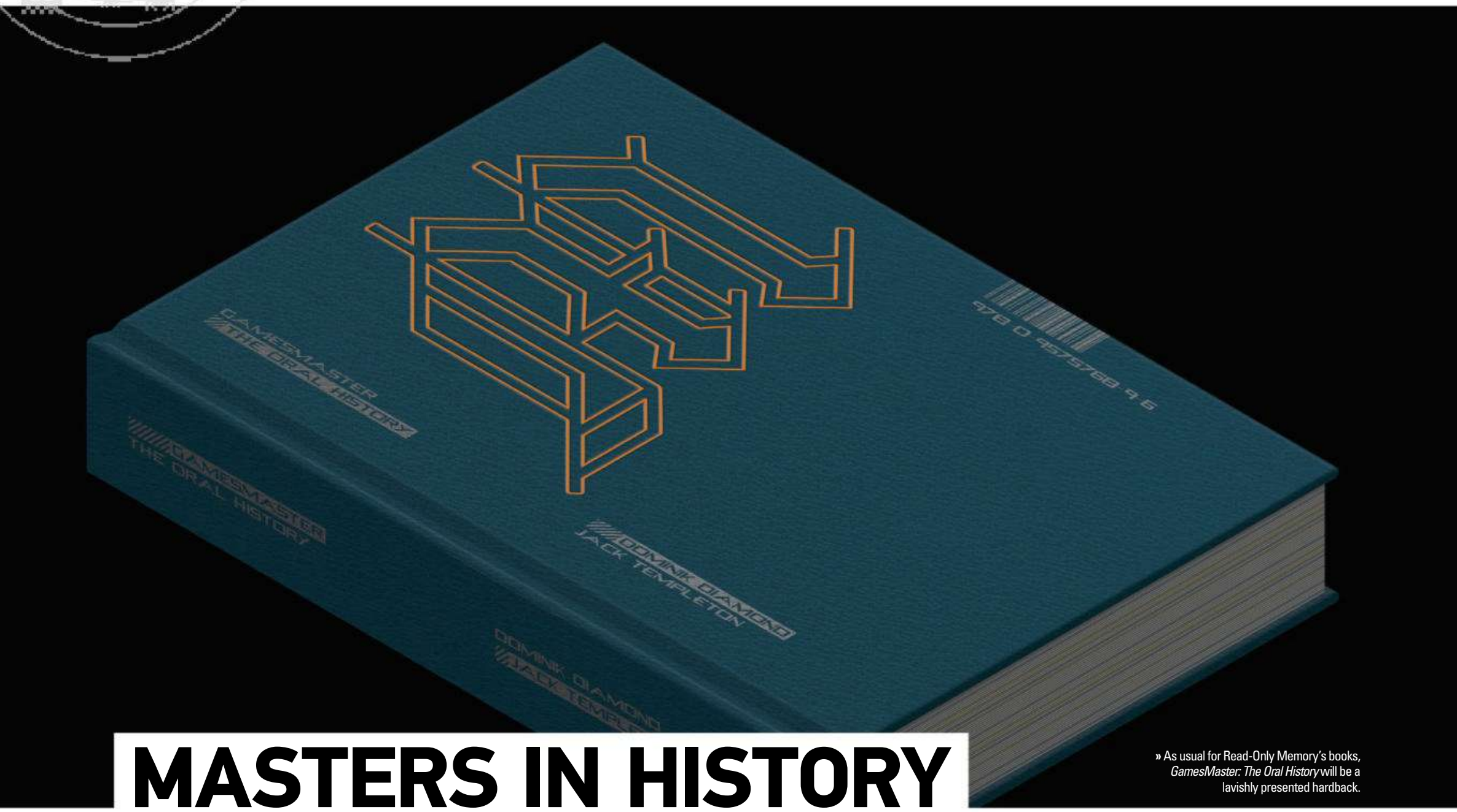
106 **Collector's Corner**
Our latest collector is a big fan of Capcom's *Resident Evil* series and has amassed an impressive amount of swag

108 **My Retro Life**
Nintendo's Switch might be a modern console, but there are lots of reasons why it deserves your attention as Darran reveals

110 **Mailbag**
Lockdown may be ending but that doesn't mean you can stop sending us letters!

114 **Endgame**
Nick slogs his way through another game so that Darran doesn't have to





» As usual for Read-Only Memory's books, *GamesMaster: The Oral History* will be a lavishly presented hardback.

MASTERS IN HISTORY

Dominik Diamond discusses GamesMaster: The Oral History

CONTENTS

6 MASTERS IN HISTORY
Dominik Diamond on why the time is right to revisit *GamesMaster*

8 IAIN LEE
Were you lucky enough to buy one of Iain's recently sold consoles?

10 MR BIFFO
Paul remembers how simple graphics actually enhanced your experience of playing games

12 A MOMENT WITH
Andrew Byatt and Sean Cleaver discuss their big plans for the multiplayer-focused Evercade VS

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick returns to July 2004 and has his first look at the PSP and DS

When it comes to TV shows about videogames, there are fondly remembered ones, and then there is *GamesMaster*. From 1992 to 1998, Patrick Moore's titular character would issue challenges to wide-eyed kids and celebrity guests alike, all of whom would battle it out for a coveted Golden Joystick. At the head of it all, the charismatic double-entendre devotee Dominik Diamond assumed hosting duties for almost all of the series' run. The show transcended the games to become a piece of the Nineties pop culture landscape in its own right, and now Read-Only Memory is publishing *GamesMaster: The Oral History*, a book in which Dominik Diamond threads together memories of the show with interviews from over 40 people including the cast, crew and guests, to charting the ups and downs of the show.

So, to kick off, how did all of this come about? "It is all down to an incredible chap called Jack Templeton who started off as a superfan stalker when the show originally aired and was responsible for the first ever *GamesMaster* website," says Dominik. "As the years went by he kept in touch and didn't kill me and chop up my body parts so he ultimately became a friend. He wanted to mark the 30th anniversary of the show in some way, so he started tracking down everybody who worked on it or appeared on it to get their memories. It quickly became clear that this had been a very special show, and decade, for everyone, and there were so many wonderful stories and behind the scenes stuff that fans were not aware of."

The book will be full of revelations for any fan of the show, and Dominik pulls no punches when it comes to things that he feels didn't work, saying, "I think it will surprise people the two series I really do not like. At all." But he believes the biggest surprise will be the story of series 3. "It will completely make people rethink Dexter Fletcher. That poor guy was held solely responsible for the failings of series 3 but once you hear the producer and director revealing what was happening behind the scenes? You will see him in a new light. I think the flak he got at the time, and still does today, is really unfair," he tells us.

Some of the stories were even a bit of a surprise to Dominik himself. "It is no secret that I lived the Nineties to its full. I partied extremely hard. And a lot of it is a blur. There were bits other people wrote about me and I would get in touch with them and say 'Really? We nearly got killed by Latino gangs at a party full of porn stars in San Francisco?'. So there were many

» Dominik moved to Canada in 2009, where he continued his career as a radio host. He currently resides in Calgary.

» Many of the visual materials were provided by Dominik, who describes himself as "a horrible hoarder of stuff like that".

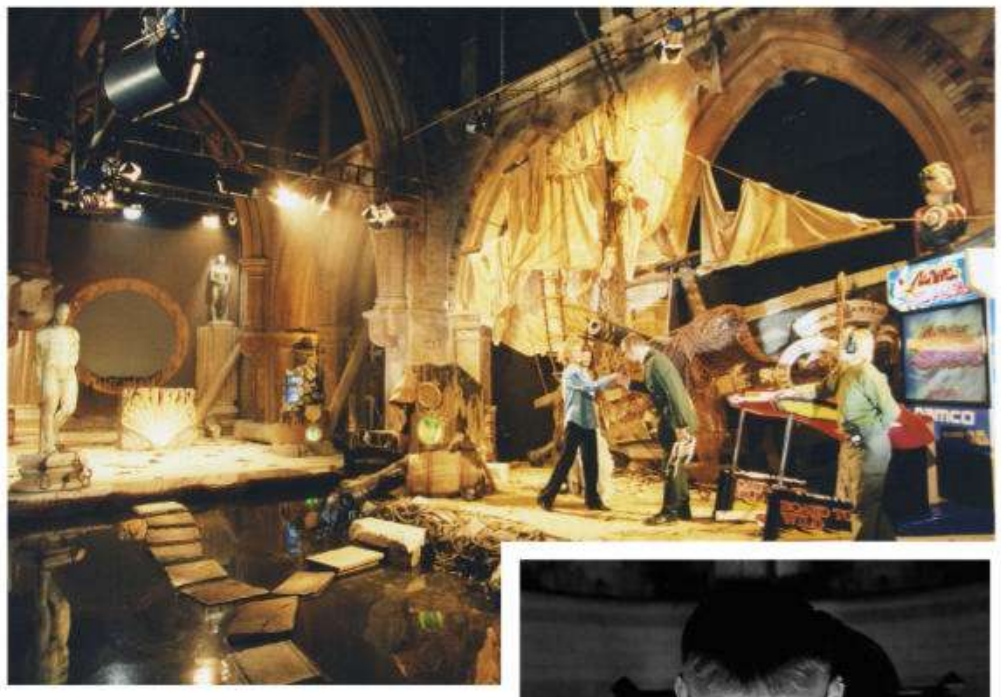
» Celebrity guest Robbie Williams wrote the book's foreword, described by Dominik as "absolutely fantastic".

» Readers should expect varied paper stock and a metallic fifth colour throughout the book.

things I had forgotten about behind the scenes," he explains. "On a more positive note, there are so many bits of shows I had forgotten were so insanely funny and unexpected. Kirk kissing me full on the mouth after I had kissed Jo Guest in Series 7 just so he could 'catch the tail end of her' is one example."

With time has come perspective, so some of the past targets of Dominik's more caustic remarks aren't subject to the same harsh treatment. "There are some things I reflect on as a fine upstanding citizen and father of three children with a less aggressive edge. I said a lot of horrible stuff at the time about *Bad Influence*, for example, and then of course we have the Dave Perry *Mario* incident. Those are two things that I looked back upon with a certain degree of mea culpa, and actually the *Mario 64* meltdown has all the major players reflecting on it in a way that has never been done before. That episode as a result becomes a Shakespearean tragedy of sorts." Another thing readers shouldn't expect is too many joystick jokes. "For me what makes the book so special is that the editor Jack Templeton kept knocking back my chapters because they had too many

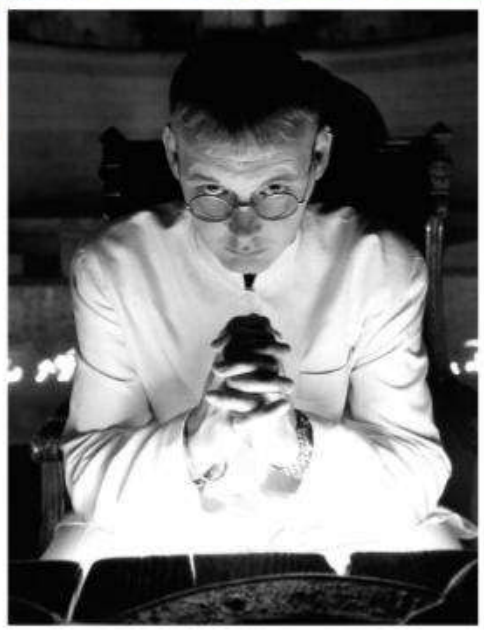
» Series 1 was set in this iconic church, where a challenge appears to be underway.



» Dominik welcomes *Coronation Street*'s Tracy Shaw to the Atlantis-themed set of series 6.

nob gags. He said, as a fan, he had heard all that already, what he wanted was genuine intelligent insight into how I felt at the time. And he was right, it's a much better book as a result."

GamesMaster: The Oral History went onto Kickstarter in March this year and generated a huge response from backers, reaching its £45,000 goal in a single day. So why, after all these years, does Dominik think the show still means so much to the fans? "We weren't just a videogames show. We were an entertainment show that used the most entertaining thing in our lives at the time – videogames – to make crazy funny stuff. That set us aside from other videogame shows, I think," he replies. "But we wouldn't have been able to do any of that if we didn't have the most insanely talented bunch of young people who devoted their entire life to coming up with the best show possible and having the most fun doing it. Making TV is never like that, really. But we had it. And we



» Here's Dominik during his *GamesMaster* days – in specific, his very welcome return in series 4.

could only do that because we had the best boss imaginable in Jane Hewland who was not just a great talent finder but someone who let that talent play in the sandbox of ideas without excessive parenting."

***GamesMaster: The Oral History* is due for release in winter 2021. For more information, visit Read-Only Memory online at readonlymemory.vg.**

SONY STORE SHENANIGANS

Sony caused a mini meltdown across the internet when it revealed that its PSP, PS3 and Vita stores would all be shutting down over the summer. A furious backlash from fans led to a change of heart from the Japanese publisher with Sony's president and CEO Jim Ryan admitting in a blog post, "Upon further reflection, however, it's clear that we made the wrong decision here." The PSP store is still closing early July, so hoover up those digital exclusives while you still can.

RESIDENT VIRTUAL

We've known for a while that a remake of *Resident Evil 4* was in the works, but it's recently been revealed that the game is going to be remade to take advantage of VR. Aspects of the Oculus Quest 2 exclusive will be reworked to fit the new first-person perspective, but it should still be the same brilliant action game that thrilled us when it first made its GameCube debut. We have to say that we're incredibly excited about this one.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainlee.

Hello, goodbye

I did it. Remember the other month I was saying how I had all these old consoles that had been modded and I never used them? A GameCube with a flash drive, a Nintendo 64 that had been upgraded to HDMI, an original Xbox with a hard drive installed, a Dreamcast with HD output and a packed memory card. They were all just sat there under the TV making me feel guilty. I bought them with the intention of streaming them. Except I didn't. I didn't even play them. I just cursed them every time I looked behind the telly and saw the absolute mess of cables and plugs lying there.

I got rid of them. Well, not all of them. Two of them. The GameCube and Xbox. Gone. Both sold for a fraction of the price I got them for. Practically given away. I bought them all in the last two and a half years. I'd got divorced and started living on my own for the first time ever. I also bought loads of old videogame magazines and tons of other, and I'm going to use the word so I apologise, crap. I spent a few grand on all this stuff and I never touched it. Each purchase was the one that would make me happy, then it would arrive and I'd realise I was still lonely, divorced and not living with my kids.

I had invested way too much emotion in these THINGS. I take back the c-word, they weren't crap, but they certainly were not the emotional rescue I was hoping they would be. If anything, they made me feel worse as I realised what I was trying to fill was an existential hole in my chest that was not Sega Saturn shaped.

I tried to give the magazines away. No one wanted them so, oh God, don't hate me, I chucked 'em. Packaging the two consoles up and sending them felt amazing. Cathartic and uplifting. They were going to good homes where I know they will be loved and used. I've already had photos of them in their new spots under televisions. Good for them. They are meant to be played and enjoyed. Not sitting in my backpack of resentments that I carry around with me 24/7.

I'm still struggling to let go of a few. The Vectrex has moved from a shelf into a cupboard. I couldn't bear to look at its sad eye every time I walked past but can't countenance getting rid. The Dreamcast will possibly survive the cull, but I have no idea why the N64 is proving so difficult to let go of [it's because it's amazing – Ed].

I love videogames, old and new (*Hitman 3* is incredible) but I don't have to own them all. They won't save my marriage, they won't cause my kids to sleep under my roof every night and they won't make me young again. This column might sound maudlin but I am feeling nothing but relief and joy. Onwards!

> "I had invested way too much emotion in these THINGS"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

NEPTUNIA VIRTUAL STARS™

PS4

Goddesses and
Virtual Idols unite in
the latest **Action RPG**
from Idea Factory!

Available on
nvs.iffyseurope.com/buy
& amazon

OUT NOW!

IDEA FACTORY

株式会社コンパイルハート
COMPILE HEART

©2020 IDEA FACTORY/COMPILE HEART All rights reserved. Neptunia is a trademark of IDEA FACTORY. Licensed to Idea Factory International, Inc. and published by Reef Entertainment. Developed by IDEA FACTORY.
The "PS" Family Logo and "PS4" are registered trademarks of Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Hints of greatness

It was the French composer Claude Debussy who said, "Music is the space between the notes." In short: without music being given the room to breathe, you're left with a cacophony of noise.

I don't know if any of the rest of you used to experience this, but often older games for me spread far beyond the boundary of what you see on the screen, precisely because they were more minimalist. The restrictions that have long been swept away by technological progress is precisely what made them so vivid and iconic.

Almost all the games that have stayed with me through my life are the ones where so much of their promise was merely hinted at. I've played all the *Call Of Duty* games, but even if you pointed an AK-47 at me, I probably couldn't tell one from another. However, I remember every last pixel of *Eric's* skool, and somehow could tell you the pattern of the wallpaper in Miner Willy's mansion (don't tell me he lived in a black – occasionally blue – void).

Invisible walls and linear pathways were a consequence of the available technology, but a good game, no matter how basic its graphics, could make it feel like I could go anywhere within its world.

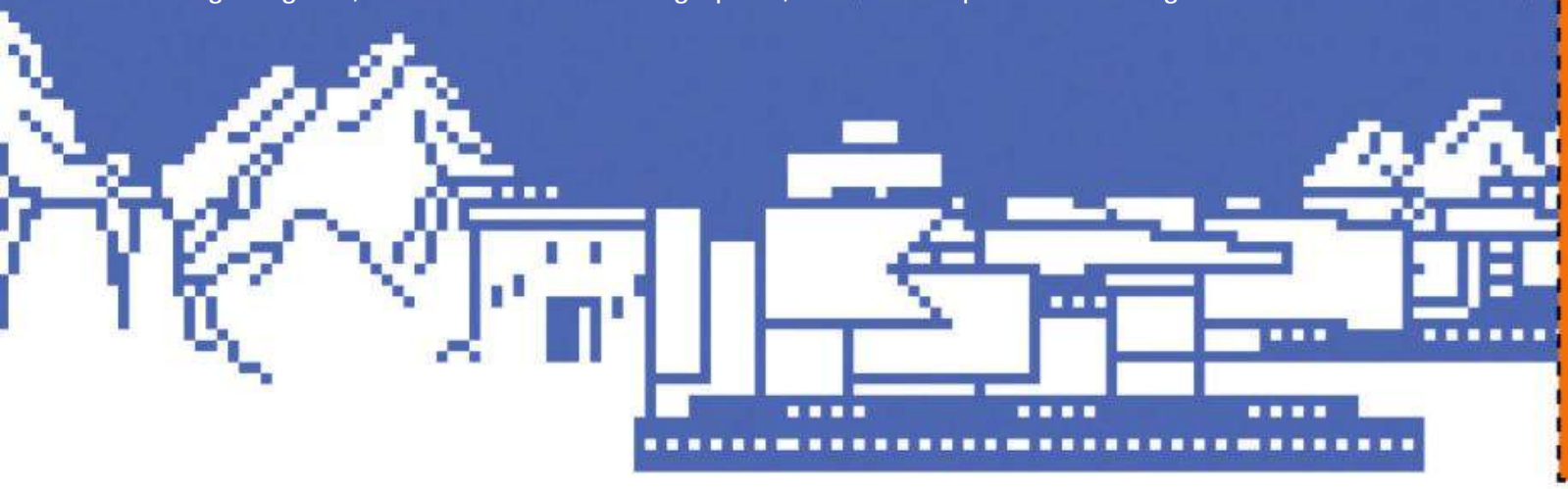
In my head, *The Lords Of Midnight*'s mountain ranges were swollen full of ominous threat, because they were rendered so simply. *Starglider* was little more than a black screen broken up with some lines and dots, but I just knew that beneath those shadows was a whole planet looking up at me. So much could be shown without showing much. Consequently, what WAS there mattered so much more.

Even as graphics became more ambitious and colourful, I was still craning my neck to peer around corners. Those gorgeous, fully painted, Parisian streets in *Broken Sword* were just asking to be wandered through. Even the original *Doom* had more atmosphere for me than its recent instalments, because they seem to revel in that cacophony. They're a constant assault of visuals and sound.

Once parallax scrolling started to become a thing, my mind fractured. The very first time I played the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, I could scarcely believe what I was seeing on a home system. I'd already become obsessed with parallax scrolling when it was used to crude, but subtly impressive, effect on the Mega Drive's *Rambo III*. I lived for those over-the-shoulder boss stages until *Sonic* came along (because, let's face it, there wasn't much else to justify the game). Admittedly, none of the stages beyond Green Hill Zone use it as well, but I wanted to reach into that screen. I wanted to explore beyond the 2D plane, and splash around in those deep, blue waters.

It's so different now, of course. In today's open-world games, if you can see it in the distance then you can travel to it. There's not really any such thing as background graphics anymore. Triple-A games have become faster, busier, more overwhelming. Everything is bigger, louder, more explosive. Literally. There's less time to appreciate what's there, and what's there is often shoved so hard in your face that your jaw detaches.

There's really no time to stop and take a shotgun to the roses.



> "In my head, The Lords Of Midnight's mountain ranges were swollen full of ominous threat, because they were rendered so simply"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

IF I HAD SOMEWHERE TO LIVE...

I COULD GO ANYWHERE IN LIFE

When Abi's mum died, life got tough. She didn't get on with her dad and the arguments became violent. Abi felt her only choice was to leave home. With just the clothes on her back, and no idea where to go, she ended up sleeping on the streets in the freezing cold.

Right now, you could give a homeless young person like Abi somewhere to start their future

Abi's life changed when she was given a room at Centrepoint. A safe place to sleep and recover. A place to develop the skills and confidence she needed to rebuild her life – and leave homelessness behind for good. Now, Abi believes she can go anywhere.

Thousands of homeless young people like Abi are desperately trying to find their place in the world – but first they need a place to start again. **You could help right now by sponsoring a room at Centrepoint for just 40p a day.**

We know this support changes lives. 88% of the young people we help move on positively in life. So please, help someone like Abi today. Thank you.

Text PLACE to 78866 to donate £3
Call free on 0800 472 5798
Visit centrepoint.org.uk/place
Or complete and return the form below

centre point

SPONSOR A ROOM. HELP A HOMELESS YOUNG PERSON FIND THEIR PLACE.

YES, I WANT TO SPONSOR A ROOM FOR £12 A MONTH

Please collect my payment on the 1st/15th of every month (please circle preferred date).

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit DIRECT Debit

To the Manager:
Name and full address of your Bank or Building Society:

Originators Identification No. 6 5 9 1 0 7

_____

_____ Postcode _____

Name(s) of Account Holder(s) _____

Bank Sort Code: ☐☐-☐☐-☐☐ Account Number: ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society: Please pay Centrepoint Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction, subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Centrepoint and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s) _____ Date _____

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

Increase your donation by 25p for every £1 you donate with Gift Aid giftaid it

☐ **By ticking this box I confirm I am a UK taxpayer and want Centrepoint to Gift Aid all donations I've made in the last four years and any donations I make in the future until I notify you otherwise. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in any tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations it is my responsibility to pay any difference.**

Your name and address are needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

Your donation will go towards funding Centrepoint's vital work with young people all year round providing accommodation and support. We sometimes use models and change the names of the young people we work with to protect their identity; however all stories are true and as told by the young person.

Full Name: _____
Address: _____
_____
Postcode: _____ Telephone: _____
Email: _____

Thank you for donating to Centrepoint today.

We'd love to show the impact of your support and share how young people continue to need your help, through newsletters, fundraising appeals and information about events. Please let us know how best to stay in touch with you by adding your details above, and ticking the relevant boxes:

☐ **Please contact me by email** ☐ **Please contact me by phone**

Last year our supporters helped us change the lives of over 15,000 homeless young people. By letting us know we can count on you, we can continue helping young people with a home and a future.

Your privacy is key.

We promise never to sell or swap your details, and will always keep them secure. You can view our Privacy Notice in full at www.centrepoint.org.uk/privacy. You can opt out of post and change how we communicate with you at any time. Please call 0800 232320 and speak to one of our friendly team or email supportercare@centrepoint.org to do this and ask us any questions.

Please return this form to: Freepost Plus RTXY-LBEA-UTJJ, Angel Fulfilment Services Ltd, Communication Centre, Par Moor Road, Par PL24 2SQ.

Registered office address: Central House, 25 Camperdown Street, London E1 8DZ. Company no. 1929421. Registered Charity no. 292411. Housing association no. H1869. VAT registration no. 649 345 018.

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

centre point give homeless young people a future

Registered Charity No 292411.
NAP2021CN

» Evercade VS features built-in Wi-Fi which Andrew says will "offer upgrades and new features via firmware updates", as well as the potential of online integration in the future.

Evercade levels up

Get the latest details on Blaze's brand-new console

Blaze Entertainment's Evercade was our favourite console launch of 2020 and proved you didn't need the latest tech to deliver a great gaming experience. It now has a new home console planned called the Evercade VS and Blaze's managing director Andrew Byatt and marketing manager Sean Cleaver are here to tell you all about it.

When will Evercade VS launch?

Andrew Byatt: The Evercade VS is going to be available from 3 November 2021 and available for pre-order from May 28. The pricing will start from £89.99/$99.99/€99.99 and will be similar to how the handheld was released, with a starter and premium pack variant and a special collector's pack with Funstock.

» Andrew Byatt told us that four arcade packs will be available when the VS launches later this year.

What can you tell us about the new arcade releases?

Sean Cleaver: We're delivering on the promise of arcade titles. The new arcade collections are going to have a purple spine design and will have a separate numbering system to the existing cartridges.

Will the arcade collections feature the same games as the existing carts?

SC: There are some arcade titles on the cartridges that have been ported and already released on previous collections, that's unavoidable due to the nature of how many were ported and the popularity of those titles at the time. However, the arcade versions are always unique and play a lot differently to some of those ports, especially those on Atari systems. There will also be more new titles on these collections than you'd first think. For our arcade launch line-up, eight out of thirty-eight currently planned games have been released previously on the Evercade with their home console ports. With the arcade versions, they are being released in what many consider to be their preferred versions of those games. Now people have the choice of both!

The second cartridge slot feels a little redundant, why include it?

AB: There's a few reasons here. The gaming world in the modern age loves choice, and all of the previous mini consoles show that choice incredibly well. Modern consoles implement great libraries on-screen to show your collection. Having two cartridge slots allows you to have that choice with the Evercade. Say you put the *Atari Collection 1* and the *Piko Interactive Collection 1* into your system, you have the choice of 40 games right there and then.

The VS can output 1080p compared to the handheld's 720p. Does it have much more powerful hardware?

SC: It does! To get technical, the VS uses a 1.5 GHz CPU which puts it on par with the PlayStation Classic, but with 1080p output. We also have 4GB

of onboard storage and 512MB of RAM. We're confident that compared to the existing classic consoles, ours is the most powerful and versatile. It also has capacity for double the players of those consoles with four USB ports. It supports any USB controller out of the box as well, so if you have existing bluetooth controllers, Sega USB controllers, or even Xbox Adaptive Controllers, it will work.

» Sean Cleaver recently joined the Evercade team and has high hopes for the incoming VS console.

We know some previous carts aren't compatible due to licensing. How will you ensure they can't be played on VS?

AB: We always try to make sure our licensing gives flexibility for us and the publisher but also is able to deliver a great selection of games, without limitation. There is one licence that only extends to Europe and to the handheld exclusively, and that is *Namco Museum*, as many people already know, as it is not available directly in North America. The cartridges are still on sale and are always going to be compatible with the Evercade handheld so these two cartridges are effectively handheld exclusives. DRM will be implemented to prevent use in the VS. We always work with the publishers to make sure we can get the best for everyone and in future we hope to work more with Namco on bringing those titles and future Namco collections to the Evercade family as a whole.

Will all new carts be compatible with the original Evercade?

SC: Yes, all new and existing cartridges, except the previously mentioned *Namco Museum* collections, will work on the handheld and the VS console. It was very important to us that the cartridge ecosystem was supported as, while the hardware is the vehicle, it's the games, the collections and the passion for them that have been the big success.

How will the new UI work and will the Evercade handheld include it?

AB: The new UI enables far more features than what's presently possible. We've brought on some great people who have worked with the existing mini consoles and emulation scene in order to create a stylised and functional UI. We will be able to implement a lot of the things that people have been asking for: scan line filters, save states with images, catalogue sorting, on-screen guides, sounds and much more. This will also include resolutions and the much requested 'Pixel Perfect' option. We will be implementing this with new firmware for the handheld as well. This will come later this year, before the VS console launches.

» The much-requested *Codemasters Collection 1* is due for release at the end of August.

» If you're wondering why *Gods* doesn't feature on the incoming *Bitmap Brothers Collection* Andrew says it's because "it wasn't available for us to publish".

» By the end of 2021 Blaze is promising over 260 games across 26 cartridges, with many games offering multiplayer support. That's a lot of gaming.

Seeing as the VS will have built-in Wi-Fi, no online play feels like a missed opportunity.

AB: Online play is something we considered during the development process and whilst the world is moving in this direction, we felt that the essence of what we are doing is to offer an experience closer to how gaming began. That's not to say that we won't develop in this area. We have some ideas that make use of the Wi-Fi capability of the console, but this will likely come in 2022 and beyond. In fact we're very much exploring all the options for things like achievements and leaderboards as we know the community wants those features.

SC: One of the main benefits of what the VS is about is playing together. Like we used to, in the same room with siblings and friends. Online gaming can add to the overall package but a reliance on it would take away that experience. Post pandemic, I think many people are going to yearn for the kind of social and communal experiences they had in their gaming youth. It's an antithesis to the modern, distanced online gaming which, while convenient, has never had the same communal, friendly atmosphere.

How did you decide on the design for the new controller?

AB: We created a controller that had sympathetic industrial design to the Evercade handheld and delivered a similar ergonomic experience. We had a lot of praise for the comfort and controls of the handheld, so we wanted to replicate that here.

Will new cartridges continue to cost £14.99?

AB: At present, cartridges will cost the same. Again it's partly simplicity and value for the player that drives this. However, some cartridges could cost more in future due to the increase of manufacturing costs that we're seeing globally across all electronics. Cart memory capacity may need to grow along with newer system's games being inherently larger. This could have a knock-on effect on costs. However, we will always try and deliver value for our customers, whatever comes in the future.

» The original Evercade system felt great to use, so we have high hopes for the new controller. You can use also your handheld system as a spare controller!

Intellivision games are due later this year. Can we expect support for other consoles as well?

SC: It is possible. Intellivision is in quite a unique space where the company still owns a lot of the games that were published on the system. Whereas many others will have multiple licences and publishers across a system, which is why we've gone down the route of publisher collections as opposed to system collections. But that means we have more to play with and as we recently revealed in our Discord community AMA, the Evercade (VS and handheld) can run N64 titles. With that and 32-bit support, there are a great many options for us with publishers as opposed to system specific releases.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JULY 2004 – It's all kicking off! This month sees the first real shots fired in the new handheld console war, and a whole bunch of exciting new games being shown off at E3. Join Nick Thorpe as he hops in the time machine to relive all of the hype

NEWS JULY 2004

Marlon Brando passed away at the age of 80 on 1 July, having suffered pulmonary fibrosis and congestive heart failure. Long revered as one of the best actors of all time, Brando had received many awards and nominations including seven Oscar nominations for best actor, with wins for *On The Waterfront* and *The Godfather*.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict became focused on the ongoing construction of the West Bank barrier this month. On 9 July, the International Court of Justice advised the UN that the barrier was illegal. The US House Of Representatives passed a resolution condemning that ruling on 15 July, but on 21 July the UN passed a resolution demanding that Israel obey the court's ruling. On 25 July, 130,000 Israelis formed a 90km human chain to protest the government's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

On 31 July, Iran officially confirmed that it had resumed building nuclear centrifuges to enrich uranium, reneging on an October 2003 commitment to halt its nuclear development programme. The move was made in retaliation to a resolution by the UN, which condemned Iran's lack of cooperation with nuclear inspectors. While the UK, France and Germany had little to say on the matter, unnamed American officials insisted that the goal of this policy was for Iran to develop its own arsenal of nuclear weaponry.

The PSP's had a visual update since its original prototype, and now features raised buttons and an analogue slider.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 2004

When Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aimé walked out onto the E3 stage in 2004, he introduced himself to the audience by telling them, "I'm about kicking ass, I'm about taking names, and we're about making games." To demonstrate those commitments, he was front and centre for the unveiling of Nintendo's new dual-screen DS handheld, along with demos of *Super Mario 64 DS*, *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, *Wario Ware Touched!* and more. *NGC* felt that the system on display was "comfy" and that "it looks a bit like something from Tiger Electronics, but the prototype casing may well evolve before the machine is released". *Edge* "came away convinced that with the right software support, it will be a massive hit with the same audience that has predominantly given Nintendo ownership of the handheld market", and noted the huge sales potential of a *Pokémon* game taking advantage of the system's wireless internet capabilities. *Cube* felt that the wireless networking "proves [Nintendo] is very serious about the online world". There was some disagreement about the graphical performance of the DS. *Cube* said "we're looking at 3D graphics that lie somewhere between the N64 and the GameCube", but *Edge* negatively compared *Super Mario 64 DS* to its N64 counterpart, noting "there aren't nearly as many polygons in the scene, and textures are PS1, not N64, in style".

However, reporting suggests that it wasn't Nintendo's machine that actually stole the show. According to *Edge* "though the initial response to PSP's appearance at SCEA's international briefing was muted by comparison to Nintendo's unveiling, when attendees actually had a chance to see footage running on Sony's machine at close quarters, the gasps were reserved for PlayStation Portable". *Edge* felt that games such as *WipEout Pure*, *Gran Turismo Mobile* and *Dynasty Warriors* "looked almost comparable, graphically, to their PS2 counterparts", and *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* agreed that the graphics were "easily pushing PS2 levels of quality", further noting that "the backlit screen is a marvel". This level of performance was a revelation to *Play*, which claimed to have "never expected any of the hype to be true" and that it had "seriously underestimated what Sony's first handheld gambit would

[PS2] One of three early shots from Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas reveals Carl Johnson, and little else about him.

[Xbox] Halo 2 – it's definitely happening this year! Peter Moore wouldn't break a henna tattoo promise, after all.

Here's the DS! It's bold, chunky and a bit ugly. Thankfully, it would receive a pre-launch makeover.

[GameCube] *Zelda* received rapturous applause, but wouldn't arrive for another two and a half years!

[Xbox] Despite its subject matter, *Full Spectrum Warrior* gained the most consistently positive reviews of the month.

be capable of". Major concerns were present in a couple of areas, though. *Play* noted the emphasis being placed on the system's Universal Media Disc format, which carried movies as well as games, remembering that "faithful Sony patrons have been burned before by the failure of the retail MiniDisc". For *Edge* "the only aspects to temper E3's atmosphere of PSP excitement was talk of battery life and price".

Of course, not everything revolved around the new handheld fight. Microsoft showed a spoof version of *The Apprentice* complete with Donald Trump, showing some fake Sony executives being fired for failing to deliver a viable online gaming service. Big news stories included a release date of 9 November 2004 for *Halo 2*, with Peter Moore having it tattooed on his arm, and EA's decision to support the Xbox Live online gaming service with its massively popular sports games. The PS2 was given a $50 price cut, taking its US price down to $150, and Sony showed off major releases for 2004 and 2005 including new concepts *Killzone* and *God Of War*, as well as the highly anticipated sequels *Gran Turismo 4* and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. Nintendo showed off the likes of *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, *Star Fox* and *Resident Evil 4*, but it was the unveiling of a new, more visually realistic *Zelda* game that "provoked the biggest single reaction to any game" of the show, according to *Edge*. As well as the rather overdue *Half-Life 2* and *FEAR*, *PC Gamer* was most excited about the scale of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, which it described as "not a city" but "a whole damn state".

But enough about the future – what about the here and now? On the Xbox, the military tactics game *Full Spectrum Warrior* (8/10 *XBM*, 8/10 *Edge*) was hailed by *Edge* as "special stuff" thanks to its "simple, stressful and compelling" combat, despite misgivings about the game releasing at a time when "allegations of allied brutality are becoming a matter of verified record". The best choices for PS2 owners were a port of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* or the *Micro Machines*-style racer *Mashed* (9/10 *Official PS2*, 8.6/10 *Official Xbox*, 5/10 *XBM*), which the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* felt was "easily reason enough to make a career hermit buy a multitap". GameCube highlight of the month was *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* (*NGC* 85%, *Cube* 8.0/10, *Edge* 6/10), described as "another great Nintendo party game" but "nowhere near as detailed or flexible as *Tiger Woods*" by *Cube*. On the PC, stealth sequel *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (*PC Gamer* 91%, *Edge* 7/10) was felt by *PC Gamer* to be "the most accessible *Thief* game yet".

Blimey, that was a lot, wasn't it? And it's enough for now, so see you all next month for the fallout!

CHARTS

JULY 2004

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – UEFA Euro 2004 (EA)
2 – Hitman: Contracts (Eidos)
3 – Transformers (Atari)
4 – Fight Night 2004 (EA)
5 – Van Helsing (Vivendi)

XBOX

1 – Hitman: Contracts (Eidos)
2 – TOCA Race Driver 2 (Codemasters)
3 – UEFA Euro 2004 (EA)
4 – Fight Night 2004 (EA)
5 – Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (Ubisoft)

GAMECUBE

1 – Sonic Heroes (Sega)
2 – Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes (Konami)
3 – Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles (Nintendo)
4 – Viewtiful Joe (Capcom)
5 – The Simpsons: Hit & Run (Vivendi)

PC

1 – Far Cry (Ubisoft)
2 – Championship Manager 03/04 (Eidos)
3 – Hitman: Contracts (Eidos)
4 – CSI: Dark Motives (Ubisoft)
5 – The Sims (EA)

MUSIC

1 – Burn (Usher)
2 – Everytime (Britney Spears)
3 – That's All Right (Elvis Presley)
4 – Friday's Child (Will Young)
5 – The Show (Girls Aloud)

THIS MONTH IN...

NGC

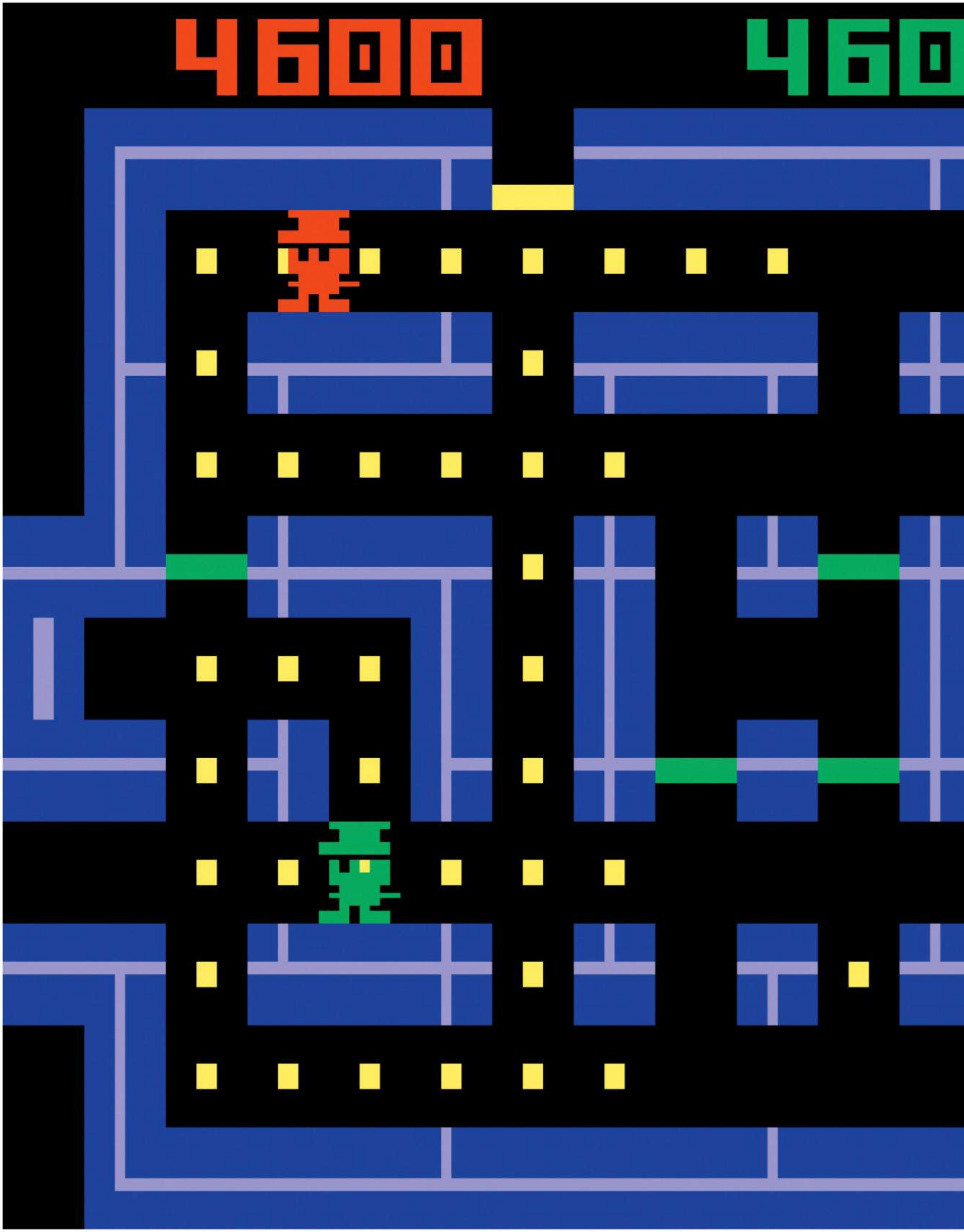
"Everyone loves to pull out the old Famicom or the SNES for a bit of retro fun, but my N64 hasn't seen the light of day for years," worries reader Joe Lawrence. He's concerned that players like him "have been spoiled by the GameCube's top graphics and gameplay" and trashes *Lylat Wars* as "very outdated" graphically, and "fiddly" to control. Oof.

Edge

Chatting to J Allard, *Edge* uncovers an interesting piece of information regarding Microsoft's decision to push Xbox Live. Retailers had apparently had concerns about Live, but had been impressed as "the group of eight people who all hang out together now buy eight copies of *Counter-Strike* instead of two or three and pass them around," according to Allard.

Play

What do you think of the new Nintendo DS, *Play*? "Gimmicky, unfinished and, well, it wasn't apparent who its audience would be. Many of the games on show made it seem like the company was trying to fit a square peg into a round hole," says the PlayStation-specific mag, perhaps unsurprisingly, getting the inter-brand slagging match off to an early start.


4600
460

Lock 'N' Chase

I'LL DEFINITELY DO MORE CRIMES

» Intellivision » 1982 » Mattel Electronics

I've rarely had a retro gaming find that has been quite as cool as the Intellivision collection I picked up back in 2013. I'd managed to miss the *Intellivision Lives* compilations over the years so I had no real experience with the console or its library at the time, but here was a system complete with 11 games, all of them boxed and most with their instructions and controller overlays. I couldn't resist, and I ended up very pleased that I experienced the system this way, rather than via the compilation. You see, my favourite Intellivision game is *Lock 'N' Chase*, which never appears on the compilations because it's a conversion of an arcade game by Data East.

When you look at the screenshot on this page, you'll probably have a pretty good idea of what the game is all about. You play a bank robber, trying to grab some swag while four police officers chase you around the screen. Every so often, bonus items will show up in the middle of the screen, and once you've cleared out the lot you need to make it to the exit to finish the stage. Of course, this will draw a lot of comparisons to *Pac-Man*, but where *Lock 'N' Chase* stands apart from Namco's classic maze game is in its use of barriers. Not only are there doors that open and close at set intervals, but you can connect the light blue lines in the walls, creating a blockade behind you that can potentially ward off the cops – but equally, one that can trap you with them.

With no offensive capabilities, you really have to think on your feet when deploying your defensive barriers, and it's quite a bit more tense than *Pac-Man* just because you never get the brief respite of the power pellets. You're just always on the run. *Lock 'N' Chase* will never be as famous as *Pac-Man*, but I love it as an example of how just a little innovative thinking can quite radically alter an experience that seems so familiar at first glance.

THE HISTORY OF R-TYPE

WHEN R-TYPE ARRIVED IN ARCADES IN 1987, HORIZONTAL SHOOT-'EM-UPS WERE NEVER THE SAME AGAIN, AND THE SERIES HAS CONTINUED TO REPRESENT THE BEST THE GENRE HAS TO OFFER EVER SINCE. WE SPEAK TO KAZUMA KUJO TO FIND OUT HOW THE SERIES HAS EVOLVED, AND WHAT'S COMING NEXT

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

Many games have unforgettable moments, but few have moments that transcend the game itself and become iconic of the entire genre. *R-Type* is one of those games – a game which stands alongside the likes of *Scramble* and *Gradius* as a milestone in the evolution of the horizontal shoot-'em-up, and a game which has been plundered repeatedly by imitators. But then, the game's own successors have leaned just as heavily on the most memorable parts of the original game, while evolving just enough to ensure that the series has always represented the best that the genre has to offer.

R-Type is a horizontal shoot-'em-up that pits the player against the evil forces of the Bydo Empire – later established to be living weapons, created by humanity. According to a developer interview from *Gamest* magazine, translated by shmuplations.com, the genre was chosen as a way to show off the developer's new 16-bit arcade hardware. In many ways, *R-Type* was similar to other games in the genre such as *Gradius*, challenging not only the player's reflexes but also their memory, as there are optimal ways to play each stage and death can cost you your power-ups. But *R-Type* carved out a distinct identity thanks to some mechanical innovations and memorable stage design.

The first of these innovations was the Wave Cannon attack, a powerful shot achieved by holding the fire button for a few seconds. "The Wave Cannon is a mechanism that allows for strong attacks without power-up items," says Kazuma Kujo, who joined Irem in the late Eighties during the development of *R-Type II*, and has been involved in the series' development since *R-Type Delta*. "I think this function was lucrative in creating a strategy against hostiles that can instantly target the player's weak spots." Though he wasn't directly involved in creating the game, Kujo remembers the insight of those that were. "In regard to the Wave Cannon, while the beam it fires is important, the charge gauge at the bottom of the screen is also crucial. The developers told me that the reason they chose to use such a long gauge for the charge despite working under strict hardware limitations was to express the charging of the energy in a more dynamic way. I even heard that the gauge's maximum length was meant to match the length of the beam at maximum charge."

While the Wave Cannon is memorable, the Force is the signature mechanic of the *R-Type* series. This drone unit can attach to the front or back of the R-9A Arrowhead ship you pilot, or be deployed as a floating, semi-autonomous unit. In the *Gamest* interview, the designer refers to it as a joke born from the idea of a dung beetle – and that you would power up the ball, rather than the ship, with Laser Crystals. "It takes some skill to master, but I think it's interesting how ▶

"I THINK THIS FUNCTION WAS LUCRATIVE IN CREATING A STRATEGY AGAINST HOSTILES THAT CAN INSTANTLY TARGET THE PLAYER'S WEAK SPOTS"
KAZUMA KUJO

» Kazuma Kujo oversaw the *R-Type* series at Irem for many years, and now leads *R-Type Final 2*'s development studio, Granzella.

» [Arcade] Enemy formations in *R-Type* are highly rigid, so memorisation will go a long way to helping you succeed.

» [Arcade] Even the nastiest of bosses will succumb to you quickly when you know how to deal with them.

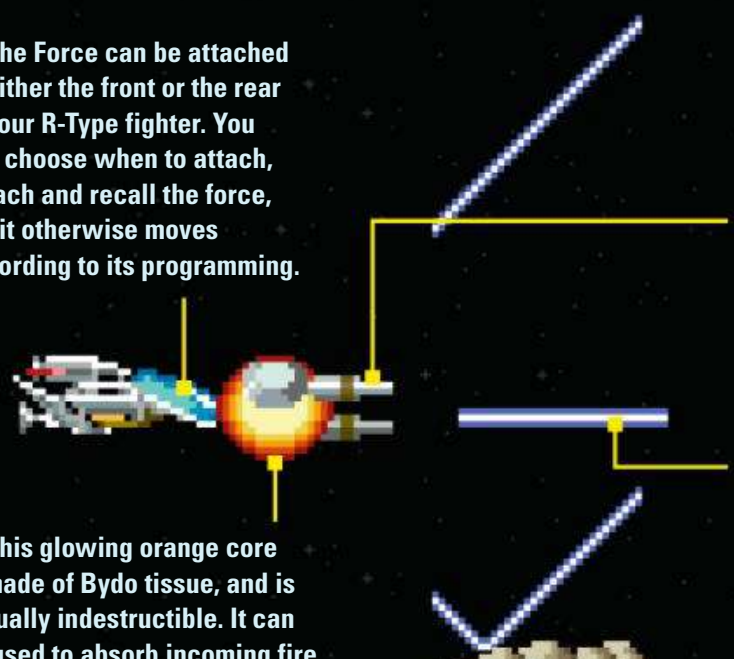
"THIS BOSS' CHARACTERISTIC DESIGN IS FASCINATING, BUT I THINK THERE IS A KIND OF INDESCRIBABLE FEAR FROM ITS COMBINATION OF BIOLOGICAL AND MECHANICAL ELEMENTS"

KAZUMA KUJO

» [Arcade] The concept of a gigantic multi-screen battleship would prove influential across the genre – it's been copied a lot.

FEEL THE FORCE

DISCOVER WHAT MAKES R-TYPE'S ICONIC POWER-UP TICK



■ **The Force can be attached to either the front or the rear of your R-Type fighter. You can choose when to attach, detach and recall the force, but it otherwise moves according to its programming.**

■ **These metal control rods inhibit the growth of the embryonic core, preventing it from maturing into a fully-formed Bydo. They also contain thrusters to direct the movement of the core.**

■ **By passing energy from the R-Type through a coloured laser crystal, the Force produces different kinds of laser attacks – traditionally anti-surface for yellow, anti-air for red and reflection for blue.**

■ **This glowing orange core is made of Bydo tissue, and is virtually indestructible. It can be used to absorb incoming fire, and even as a battering ram with which to destroy enemy craft.**

REINFORCEMENTS

DON'T LIKE THE REGULAR FORCE? HERE ARE SOME OF THE MANY ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE

1. SHADOW FORCE

■ This tricky force, first seen in *R-Type III*, is ideal for players that want to cover every direction – particularly with the blue laser, which will fire in the opposite direction to the ship's movement.

2. CYCLONE FORCE

■ If you like to get up close and personal with the Bydo baddies, this does enormous damage on contact. It's ideal for players that like to fling the Force around, rather than hiding behind it.

3. TENTACLE FORCE

■ Introduced in *R-Type Delta* and taking inspiration from Irem's own *X-Multiply*, this Force's control rods can spread out for interesting whip-style attacks, as well as providing an excellent defensive barrier.

4. ANCHOR FORCE

■ Another Force that comes from *R-Type Delta*, but one that's good for throwing around. This one is tethered to your R-Type fighter and clamps onto Bydo with its control rods, dealing major contact damage.

5. BYDO FORCE

■ If you've had enough of being pummelled by the opposition, why not unleash their own evil against them? This stable, controlled Bydo organism is capable of some rather icky biological attacks.

6. MR HELI FORCE

■ Here's a treat for the nostalgic Irem fans – it's Mr Heli!

the changing of its position was expressed and that the fun of this game is that you couldn't change the Force's position from the front to the rear with a press of a button. The process of mastering this is the fun of playing *R-Type*," says Kujo, before divulging some more details from the original team. "At the beginning of development it seemed it was difficult for the Force to be understood as an 'ally'. At the start, it wasn't surrounded by metal rods as it is now. It seems that these rods ended up being devised to make the Force not look like an enemy unit. I also was told by someone who was in charge of development at the time that the Force's mechanic of appearing from the left side of the screen was so that it wouldn't be mistaken as an enemy."

» [Arcade] You can see *R-Type II*'s search laser in action here, with 45-degree bends to aid in targeting.

» [Arcade] While the second game's battleships were smaller, there were more of them to contend with through the stage.

For all of the great shooting mechanics, *R-Type* wouldn't have been nearly as memorable had it not been for the visually impressive stages and the malevolent monstrosities that inhabited them. The bosses in particular made an enormous impression on players, with the *Alien*-inspired first boss Dobkeratops gaining truly iconic status amongst fans. "This boss' characteristic design is fascinating, but I think there is a kind of indescribable fear from its combination of biological and mechanical elements," says Kujo. "The first *R-Type* boss scene song you hear perfectly matches Dobkeratop's visuals and leaves a strong impression. It is a symbolic boss of the *R-Type* series in every sense."

The third stage also drew the attention of players, as they flew around a huge battleship that served as both the setting for the stage and its boss. "I heard from the person in charge that it was made on the basis of being a stage of defeating enemies larger than the screen," remembers Kujo. "At the time of development, it seems he was thinking about making it the final stage. But because other development staff found this stage impressive and there were a limited number of players who could reach the final stage of the arcade game, he decided to make it the third stage set in a mountainous area." The concept of a fight against a giant battleship has become symbolic of the series too, and is often duplicated in later games.

» [Arcade] The new multi-directional Wave Cannon attack in *R-Type II* was great for clearing wide areas.

R-Type made its arcade debut in Japan in 1987, and was an instant smash – Japanese arcade operators surveyed by the trade magazine *Game Machine* ranked it as the best earning non-dedicated game for three whole months, dethroning Capcom's *1943*, and it would hang around the top ten rankings into early 1988. In the US, the game was picked up for distribution by Nintendo, becoming the first dedicated cabinet the company had offered since *Punch-Out!!* three years earlier. Reviewing the arcade game, *Commodore User* noted that while the concept wasn't original "what it does, it does so incredibly well", and described the first boss as "one of the most loathsome and graphically complex monsters captured in an arcade game yet". The review concluded that *R-Type* was "one hell of a game" and awarded it a 9/10 score.

The game's popularity meant that it was soon converted to a wide variety of consoles and computers, where it achieved even more success. Particularly notable conversions included a very good Master System version by Compile that featured an extra exclusive bonus stage, a technically extraordinary ZX Spectrum version coded by Bob Pape, and the Amiga version that Factor 5 was compelled to create due to legal threats. The best of the lot was the PC Engine version, which was as close to arcade perfection as was possible at the time, and served as a fantastic advert for NEC's console. Even the fact that the Japanese HuCard release was split into two parts didn't diminish the impression that conversion made, though the complete game was later issued on CD-ROM complete with a remixed soundtrack.

It's no surprise that *R-Type II* was quickly put into production, and the developers chose to make modest changes to a successful formula. In fact, the second war against the Bydo maintained an entirely familiar rhythm. Like the first game, the opening stage saw you flying into a base from open space. The second took you into a cave of fast-moving creatures – this time filled with water – and the third pitted you against not one large battleship, but several slightly smaller ones that still dwarfed your own R-9C War-Head. That too was a redesigned version of the R-9A from the original game. One thing that was notable was that the game was harder. "*R-Type II* became more difficult because it was necessary to stoke the desire to challenge and overcome within fans who thoroughly enjoyed playing *R-Type*," says Kujo.

One of the major changes that was made was to the weaponry available. "There were many original ideas for lasers and Wave Cannons from the first *R-Type*, so I've heard that new weapons were taken from there, chosen to be used as differently as possible from the original three lasers," Kujo tells us. A new two-stage charging process was introduced for the Wave Cannon, with the first step unleashing the standard blast and the second launching a new multi-directional attack. Additionally, two new Laser Crystal power-ups were introduced – the green Search Laser, which adjusts in the air to find targets, and the grey Shotgun Laser, which fires a short range explosive shot.

Released in December 1989 in Japan and to the rest of the world in 1990, *R-Type II* didn't have the same impact as the original. Rankings in *Game Machine* show it as having a strong start, entering the chart in second place and staying in the top ten for the month that followed, before declining over the following two months until it left the top 25. *R-Type II* was popular with the UK press, though most noted the game's similarity to its predecessor. *Zzap!64* claimed that "Irem are marketing the sequel as an upgraded version of the original and that's about all it is", while *Your Sinclair* noted that the game "feels more like a set of additional extra levels for the original game than a brand-new one".

R-Type II didn't receive the same wide home release as its predecessor,

initially appearing in well-received Amiga, Atari ST and Game Boy versions. But the game did find a second life as the basis for *Super R-Type* (1991), a SNES game that heavily remixed the arcade original. Four of the original six stages came across, joined by three brand-new stages, and the new grey and green weapons had their functions replaced too. Reviewers at the time gave this version a reasonably warm welcome, but had their reservations. In *CVG*, the reviewers awarded it 91% in spite of complaints that while it was "one hell of a good conversion and a great game", *Super R-Type* "ought to be flawless on a machine like the Famicom". *Raze* awarded it 77%, noting that "you get more than five sprites on-screen and the whole game locks up", while *Super Play Gold*'s retrospective review awarded it 72%, noting the slowdown and "an infuriating lack of restart points".

In the arcades, Irem decided to take the series in a different direction. *Cosmic Cop*, or *Armed Police Unit Gallop* in Japan, is a spin-off that is officially considered to be related to the series and has been referenced in later games, but doesn't bear its name or use its signature mechanics. Instead, the next game to bear the *R-Type* name would be *R-Type Leo*. "*R-Type Leo* originally began as a new shooting game. By the time I was shown this game during a test play, it had a different title. After that and discussions with those from various positions and the development team, it was given the *R-Type* handle and the non-numbered title of *Leo*," Kujo recalls. "I support this change because while *R-Type Leo* doesn't have a Force or a Wave Cannon, signature side-scrolling shooter-game tactics and gameplay elements such as the utilisation of space in front of and behind the fighter made it into the game," he says.

***R-Type Leo* differs from the main series games in many ways – much more natural imagery is used in the stage themes, and two-player simultaneous play is possible for the first time.** Rather than the standard Force, *R-Type Leo* allows players to equip with two Psy-Bit devices, which provide auxiliary fire that can be switched to give rear cover. "You can say that the Psy-Bit installed in *R-Type Leo* is an evolved form of the *R-Type* equipment," says Kujo. While *R-Type Leo* is considered to be a bit too different from the norm to count as a main *R-Type* game, Kujo still respects its place in the history of the series. "I believe the Force is an essential element of *R-Type*, but *Leo* is the title that showed us new possibilities for the *R-Type* series. We were inspired by *Leo* in the production of *R-Type Delta*, *R-Type Final* and *R-Type Final 2*."

R-Type III: The Third Lightning was the first wholly original *R-Type* game to be developed for the home market, and was handled by Irem's Tokyo subsidiary, previously known as Tamtex. Some new mechanical wrinkles helped to freshen up the *R-Type* formula, which by now was well-known by players. This game reverted to the standard three Laser Crystals, but introduced the choice to select your Force at the start of the game. The standard Force was joined by two new types, the Cyclone Force and the Shadow Force, each of which offered different weapon capabilities. *R-Type III* also introduced a new Hyper Wave Cannon mode, which allowed for consecutive shots once charged but had a cool-down period that the regular Wave Cannon didn't. Fortunately, perhaps in part due to being designed for the SNES from the very start, *R-Type III* didn't have the technical problems with slowdown and flickering sprites that had plagued *Super R-Type*. Better yet, what it *did* have was some smart boss designs that used the system's famed Mode 7 for rotation and scaling.

Japanese players got *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* in 1993, with other markets following in 1994. "Gone is the slowdown, the jerky graphics and unintelligent baddies", proclaimed *CVG*'s review. "In are three new weapon system defaults, lashings of bolt-on weapons and clever Mode 7 effects which are part of the gameplay". The game scored 88% – a little higher than the 83% awarded by *Super Play*. "All those ideas may be getting a bit old now", the popular SNES magazine opined, "but when they've been twisted, moulded, morphed and improved to produce a game as impressive as this, what does it matter?". Raylight Studios later ported *R-Type III* to Game Boy Advance in 2004, but it is unfortunately rather less polished than the original SNES game.

» [SNES] As an early SNES game, *Super R-Type* struggled to maintain speed when the screen was packed with sprites like this.

» [Arcade] In the early going, *R-Type Leo*'s space theme at least fit the series' established aesthetic.

THE ETERNAL ENEMY

NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO TO DOBKERATOPS, IT KEEPS COMING BACK FOR MORE – HERE ARE ALL OF ITS APPEARANCES SO FAR

R-TYPE

Here's the classic enemy – the horrific beast with hideous flesh covering unfathomable internal technology, and a nasty little green abdominal growth.

R-TYPE II

The Bydo had the technology, and they rebuilt Dobkeratops in the heavily armoured Zabtom. You won't recognise it unless you destroy its helmet.

R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING

Dobkeratops Albino is a slightly spikier version of the original, with an alternative black version to fight in the second loop of the game.

R-TYPE DELTA

This variant, known as Subkeratom, can be knocked out when you attack its traditional abdominal weak spot – but that's when the trouble starts.

"IN THE PROJECT'S FIRST DRAFT, A COMPLEX POWER-UP SYSTEM WAS CONSIDERED BUT WAS LATER CHANGED TO THE ABILITY TO SELECT CHARACTERISTIC AIRCRAFT IN THE RE-PLANNING STAGES"
KAZUMA KUJO

The series fell dormant after *R-Type III*, in part thanks to Irem's decision to wind down game production for a time. Kujo would briefly leave the company to form Nazca, where he would work on the original *Metal Slug*, but returned in time for his first direct involvement with the series. Having tested the waters with *R-Types*, a PlayStation compilation of *R-Type* and *R-Type II*, the company was convinced that a brand-new game in the series could potentially be profitable. From this, *R-Type Delta* was born. This new game didn't do much to mess with the winning formula the series had established, with familiar attack waves and even some classic bosses returning, but it did give the series a fresh coat of polygonal paint. "I was prepared for opposition against the 3D graphics, but I got a more favourable reception than expected," Kujo recalls.

One of the major additions was a new ultimate attack. "From the planning stages, *Delta* was an *R-Type* title designed for home gaming consoles. With those that purchased the game being able to play as far as they can in mind, I decided to implement an attack that could purge all bullets on the screen while still maintaining a certain level of difficulty," says Kujo. "The core function of *R-Type* is the Force, which incorporates the power of the Bydo, so we made it possible to accumulate energy by absorbing bullets or directly damaging the enemies." This reward for using the Force as a shield became known as the Dose system, which would return in both *R-Type Final* and *R-Type Final 2*.

While that concept survived from planning to completion, another one was changed heavily ▶

TACTICAL SHIFT

HOW R-TYPE PIVOTED TO TURN-BASED STRATEGY IN ITS POST-SHOOTING YEARS

Fans around the world were shocked for two reasons when *R-Type*'s PSP return was announced. Firstly, the series was supposed to be finished, as *R-Type Final* made clear. Secondly, the new game – *R-Type Tactics*, or *R-Type Command* in North America – wasn't a shooting game at all. Instead, the series would move to turn-based strategy.

The original *R-Type Tactics*, released in 2007 in Japan and 2008 elsewhere, retained some of the series' signature trappings. Like the shooting games, it is viewed from the side, but with units now assigned to positions on a hexagonal grid. You can choose from many of the spacecraft from the shooting games, and just as in those games they always face the right of the screen, confronting the left-facing Bydo menace. However, freed from the burden of direct control over a ship, you can now command large fleets in battle. The game offers plenty to get through, with 58 missions to complete, and received mildly positive reviews.

***R-Type Tactics II: Operation Bitter Chocolate* arrived in 2009, once again as a PSP exclusive and this time as a Japan-only release. The gameplay remained broadly the same, but a new story featured the Bydo as well as two human factions, the Earth Allied Armed Forces and the Granzella Revolutionary Army. The game supports importing a profile from the first game, allowing you to continue with your previous save. Though there has been no official English release for this game, fans released an English translation patch in 2018.**

R-TYPE FINAL

This encounter with Dobkeratops is almost sad – it appears to be hooked up to some kind of life-support system. That sadness ends when it starts attacking.

R-TYPE FINAL 2

Frozen over yet still ready for revenge, Dobkeratops returns to serve as the first stage boss here – once you've released it from its icy prison of course.

INTERSTELLAR IMITATORS

R-TYPE HAS INSPIRED QUITE A FEW GAMES OVER THE YEARS – HERE ARE SOME NOTABLE EXAMPLES

KATAKIS

This game, originally for the C64 in 1987 and ported to the Amiga in 1988, landed Rainbow Arts in hot water with *R-Type*'s official licensee Activision Europe. The developer was threatened with a potential lawsuit – *unless* it agreed to take on the official Amiga conversion of *R-Type*!

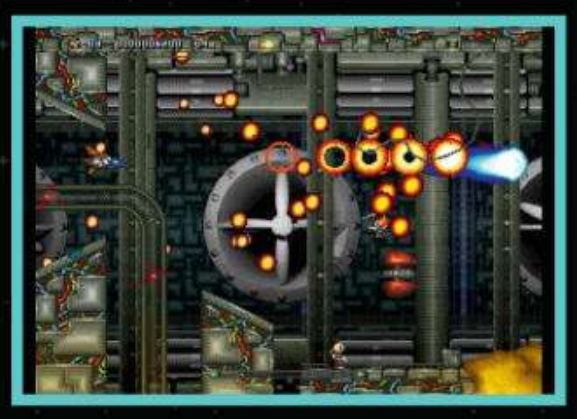
XEXEX

With Irem's shooting games having proven strong competitors to Konami's *Gradius* series, Konami decided to incorporate some of their innovations into this 1991 arcade game. As well as *X-Multiply*'s tentacle attack, this game's spacecraft has a detachable orb that works rather like *R-Type*'s signature Force.

PULSTAR

This 1995 Neo Geo game was developed by Aicom – a team founded by ex-Irem developers. The similarities to *R-Type* are undeniable, with a very similar Force, plenty of visual references and high difficulty. However, those lovely pre-rendered 3D graphics do visually set it apart from the real deal.

LAST HOPE



NG Dev Team released this rather tough blaster for the Neo Geo platforms and the Dreamcast, with the first arriving in 2007. Much like *Pulstar*, this one uses pre-rendered visuals, but bullets were difficult to spot in the initial releases. An updated version titled *Last Hope: Pink Bullets* remedied that.

Z-EXEMPLAR

Rather than drawing its inspiration from the arcade version of *R-Type*, Suminell Studios clearly enjoyed Bob Pape's excellent Spectrum conversion – just look at that signature Sinclair look. *Z-Exemplar* was released in 2016 and is available on PC, Mac, iOS and Android, and also draws from *Gradius*.

» [SNES] SNES shooters rarely looked better than *R-Type III*, and the technical performance holds up well too.

along the way. "In the project's first draft, a complex power-up system was considered but was later changed to the ability to select characteristic aircraft in the re-planning stages," Kujo says. "At the gameplay's start, I wanted the player to be able to choose according to their mood for the day and have the Force and Wave Cannon as different as possible from other aircraft to make their decision impactful. The artist responded and suggested aircraft with distinctive shapes and colouring." In the final game, the R-9A2 Delta was joined by the RX-10 Albatross and R-13A Cerberus, and Kujo notes, "These efforts to create unique fighters led to the planning of *R-Type Final* later."

R-Type Delta reviewed well upon its release in 1998, with *Play* magazine awarding it 90% and describing it as "simply amazing and amazingly simple to play". The *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* scored it 8/10, noting that "it doesn't do a great deal that previous versions haven't", but concluding "*R-Type Delta* is fun – surely a game's only remit?". Back in issue 51 of

Retro Gamer, Kujo said that *R-Type Delta* "was successful and sold well, but I'd have to say that we were hoping for more". Today, his feelings on the game are more forward-focused. "Because there was this title, there was 2003s *R-Type Final*, and now we're able to make *R-Type Final 2*. I think *Delta* was a title that allowed for new possibilities within *R-Type*."

That mixture of feelings surely have informed the team's decision to make a new game in the series, and to make sure it was the last. "At that time (and perhaps even now) side-view shooting games were no longer a mainstream genre, so it was a difficult type of title to gain popularity. *R-Type* was also known to be tough, so I thought it'd be challenging to release games of this genre in the future," says Kujo. "I felt sorry for fans who would want a sequel, so I chose a title that would denote it being the last *R-Type*." Indeed, there was no mistaking the intention surrounding *R-Type Final* – it was there to act as a last hurrah for the series.

While the game developed on systems introduced in *R-Type Delta*, *R-Type Final* was built to last. "Numbers in shooting games are very small. Many home console games lacked volume, such as 'you can choose from four fighters' and 'all seven stages,'" Kujo tells us. "I wanted to set numbers from the start that would be unthinkable for a shooting game and relay the notion that you could play for a long time, so I started developing 99 fighters. During development, we decided to add two additional graphical versions of the 99th aircraft, bringing the total to 101." This huge number certainly lent to the celebratory appeal of the game.

However, there's a change in atmosphere. From the moment you fly into the ruins of the first stage, the mood is sombre. Rather than sadness at the end of a great series though, Kujo wanted it to feel this way to fit the story being told. "It can definitely feel that way because it contains plot developments that don't lead to a happy ending, and I think that part carries over into *R-Type Final 2*," he explains. "It's unlikely that mankind will be unharmed in the battle against unknown lifeforms that attack from a universe beyond, and there will be various influences and circumstances awaiting the player's main character. This I wanted to create."

» [PlayStation] Should we say familiar faces popped up in *R-Type Delta*? Could you class this as having a face?

That fed into how the game ended, too. "The Force, the player's strong partner in *R-Type*, is made from Bydo fragments, so it felt natural to have Bydo influence on the fighter. I felt that weapons should evolve into something more powerful. That's why at the start of *R-Type Final*'s development, we chose to introduce 'Bydozation' of the player's aircraft," explains Kujo. "When the stage is cleared, how will Earth welcome the player who's been transformed into the Bydo? Such a question was considered for the final stage's setting." That's not the only possible ending, though. "The intention to have several final stages was there from the start. I wanted to make each of the final stages different not only in terms of what kinds of enemies appear, but also through player and game system settings," says Kujo.

R-Type Final was released in Japan in 2003, and followed to North America and Europe in 2004. The Japanese version was enthusiastically seized upon by the UK press, and earned some good scores. "*R-Type Final* takes all the elements that made the original great and then adds lush three-dimension backgrounds and other graphical treats", said *Play*, awarding it 89%. *Edge* gave the game 8/10, despite complaining of "several heavy doses" of slowdown, deciding that the game was still "close to the best in the genre".

» [Xbox 360] *R-Type Dimensions* is a fab remake of the first two games, which offers both original graphics and this neat 3D mode.

For the best part of two decades, *R-Type Final* lived up to its name. The *R-Type Command* spin-offs took the series in a different direction, and there were various releases of the classics, from the 3D remake *R-Type Dimensions* to Retro-Bit's cartridge reissue of *Super R-Type* and *R-Type III*. But a new shooting game was not forthcoming, and it appeared as if the series truly had become a thing of the past – especially as Irem had once again ceased to develop games, with Kujo leaving to form Granzella in 2011. However, the gaming world has changed considerably since the original *R-Type Final* was released, with many supposedly impossible dreams finally coming true. In 2021, the fight against the Bydo begins anew as *R-Type Final 2* is finally ready for take-off.

So why, after all this time, did Kujo and his team at Granzella decide to revisit *R-Type* as a shoot-'em-up? "We thought if we made full use of the current development and gameplay environment, a new experience that's never been seen before in *R-Type* could be possible. I was surprised myself to discover that there were still many *R-Type* fans who wanted a new title," he explains.

The idea of a new *R-Type* seemed too good to be true for many players, and when it was announced on 1 April 2019, quite a few people simply refused to believe that it was real. "I was surprised," admits Kujo. "Quite a few people and the media asked me 'Is this real information?'" It didn't help that *R-Type Final 2* had previously been announced on 1 April back in 2005, as part of the reveal of the Exidna – a fake next generation console that was Irem's April Fool's Day joke for the year. But there was a reason for the choice, as Kujo explains. "For Japanese companies, April 1 can be considered the beginning of their year, so I was going to announce it during this period. Seeing everyone's reaction, I regretted going with this confusing timing."

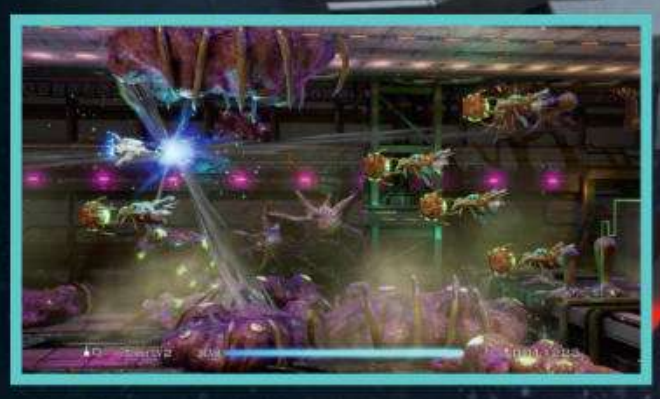
» [PS4] A good Wave Cannon shot will still tear through early enemies like they're absolutely nothing.

***R-Type Final 2* has been Granzella's first experience with crowdfunding via Kickstarter.** "We're a small publisher, so to launch a new project we need to start with funding. Also, it's very important to see whether there is any real demand for the games we're going to make. Side-shooting is no longer a mainstream genre, and many companies are not so optimistic about releasing new side-shooting games," Kujo begins. "But rather than thinking negatively about the genre with such a mindset or wondering if fans wouldn't be impressed, we decided to ask the fans directly if, even now, they really want to play a side-shooter. Crowdfunding allowed us to see demand that had yet to be fulfilled and helped us a lot in moving forward with the project funding-wise".

Granzella is not about to reinvent the wheel, and is focused on simply providing more *R-Type* for fans. "Basic mechanics follow that of the previous *R-Type Final*, so there's no need to learn anything new," says Kujo. "*R-Type Final 2* focuses on visual enhancement, stage variations and the increase of collectable elements each time you play. So, those who played previous *R-Type* works and Tozai Games' *R-Type Dimensions* can enjoy it straight away." However, with almost 18 years separating *R-Type Final 2* from its predecessor, there is consideration for newcomers. "Players who never experienced the *R-Type* series should try the 'Special Weapon' that allows for emergency evasion via attack. If the difficulty is set to Easy, the 'Special Weapon' will charge quicker," advises Kujo.

» [PS4] Bydo botany is not something we'd particularly like to engage in – kill it with fire!

With the game design being very similar to that of past games, most of the extra capabilities of modern hardware have been used to improve the visuals, "Of course, the visual expression of enemies, backgrounds and aircraft can now be depicted with intricate details. Also, the 16:9 screen size is perfect for side-shooting games," says Kujo. For fans,



» [PS4] With the power of modern consoles, the more organic parts of the Bydo overgrowth look squelchier than ever.

» [PS4] Traditional weaponry like the classic anti-surface laser naturally returns for *R-Type Final 2*

that will translate to seeing past glories in a whole new way. "In the R Museum, a mode where you can view the fighter vessels, you can appreciate them from viewpoints not possible during *R-Type Final* and also take a closer look at each aircraft's shape," Kujo tells us.

But by far the most exciting trips to the past will be the remade versions of classic stages, as Kujo explains. "Since this was a campaign for fans, we wanted to have a plan that touched upon their memories of *R-Type*. In addition, we respect the previous *R-Type* titles our predecessors made (in which some of our previous work is included as well), so we set them as stretch goals," he tells us. "Unfortunately, some titles' stages did not reach the production stage. On the other hand, we are producing *R-Type*'s stage even though it hadn't actually reached its stretch goal."

While Kickstarter offered new possibilities for Granzella, did it cause any problems? "There were no problems, per se, but the game's development was a reserved operation so I feel sorry that there was a period of time when I couldn't visually report the project's progress and give information to those who supported me," says Kujo. "Overall, the people who backed us were friendly and encouraging and we were able to reach this point due to their moral and financial support. There are no words to describe how grateful we are."

Many of you will already know whether or not you're interested in *R-Type Final 2*, but Kujo has a final message for first time players that confirms the team's ambition for the game. "While there are no particular features for new *R-Type* players, the beginning stage on Easy difficulty has been made quite simple to clear. During this stage, we hope newcomers will get acclimated to the game. If it's still difficult, please let Granzella know and we'll add a mode that's easier to complete. On the other hand, if it's too easy we'll add a more difficult mode," he says. "As such, we'll continue to add and improve *R-Type Final 2* over the coming years because we see this title as a platform for *R-Type*. Thank you very much."

R-Type Final 2 is out now, and is available for PS4, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, Switch and PC.

» [PS4] It's the classic wheel of death segment from the first game's first stage, but like we've never seen it before.

BYDO BYGONES

HOW R-TYPE FINAL 2 PROVIDES THE ULTIMATE R-TYPE MUSEUM

One of the greatest features of the original *R-Type Final* was the awesome R Museum. As you unlocked new ships to fight with, they would have their entries added to this museum, which would eventually grow into a comprehensive guide to the game's 101 *R-Type* fighter craft. Individual ship entries covered their history in the fight against the Bydo, with details including which companies manufactured them and how they developed from their predecessors, as well as explaining the function of their weaponry and allowing you to view each ship.

The R Museum is back in *R-Type Final 2*, and it looks like it will supplant its predecessor as the ultimate guide to the *R-Type* series. The R Museum is set out in a family tree style once again, charting the evolution of each main model of *R-Type* spacecraft, but this time it's possible to go right down to the floor of the museum, taking a first-person pilot's eye view to get up close and personal with each of the magnificent machines. Where the PS2 ships looked very much like models, the power of modern console hardware allows each craft to be rendered with a considerably greater level of detail than before, giving you a real appreciation for the mechanical design of each *R-Type* fighter. We may well also get new details pertaining to the latest operation in the seemingly never-ending war against the Bydo, too – a tantalising prospect, we're sure you'll agree.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

AND RECEIVE A FREE SEGA MEGA DRIVE CONTROLLER

GIFT WORTH £30

- Officially SEGA licensed Bluetooth controller
- Compatible with PC, Mac, Android and Switch
- Features a rechargeable 500mAh lithium ion battery that offers 20 hours of playtime

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE NOW AT

www.magazinesdirect.com/sega21

SUBSCRIBE TO **RETRO GAMER** TODAY FOR JUST **£25** FOR 6 MONTHS

Reasons to subscribe...

- Stunning exclusive subscriber-only covers
- You'll never miss an issue!
- It's delivered direct to your door
- Brilliant value – save money on the cover price

Exclusive ***Subscriber Cover*** *Every Issue!*

UPGRADE TO INCLUDE DIGITAL FOR ONLY **£2.50**

Increase your saving to 57%

SEE THE FULL RANGE AND ***ORDER ONLINE*** *AT*

www.magazinesdirect.com/sega21

TERMS & CONDITIONS Prices and savings are compared to buying full priced print and digital issues. You can write to us or call us to cancel your subscription within 14 days of purchase. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your statutory rights are not affected. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available upon request. Gift is only available for new UK subscribers. Gift is subject to availability. Please allow up to 60 days for the delivery of your gift. In the event of stocks being exhausted we reserve the right to replace with items of similar value. For full terms and conditions please visit: bit.ly/magtandc. Offer ends **05/09/2021**.

THE EVOLUTION OF

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

A new benchmark was set for C64 gaming with the release of Impossible Mission, but Dennis Caswell let others follow-up his secret agent platformer. Dennis and the designers of Impossible Mission's sequels explain how the series evolved

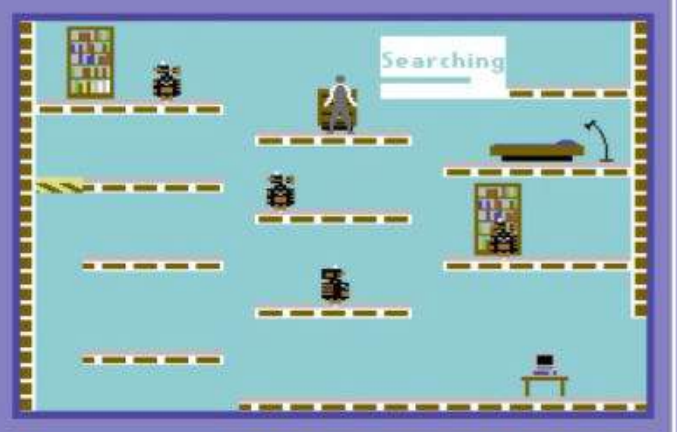
WORDS BY RORY MILNE

» Dennis Caswell left games development behind long ago, but he still codes for a living.

» Although developed in Hungary, *Impossible Mission II* was project managed by Ron Fortier in California.

Inspiration is often found by accident, but sometimes it's deliberately sought out. The latter was the case when Dennis Caswell went to the movies and came back with the germ of an idea for his next project. Dennis then took further inspiration from a hit Atari 8-bit title, and as he explains, the result was a covert operation-themed platformer. "The idea for *Impossible Mission* was triggered by the movie *WarGames*, which I went to see with the express purpose of finding inspiration for a new game," Dennis says. "The movie gave me the idea of infiltrating a high-tech installation of some sort, but the similarity ended there. The platform design was influenced largely by games like *Jumpman*, the creator of which sat down the hall from me for a time."

Having settled on a premise and a genre for his latest project, Dennis next created a lead character, which he based on the live-action super spies of an earlier decade. "The secret agent aspect was not modelled on any specific example," Dennis notes, "but I was strongly affected by Sean Connery's portrayal of James Bond, as well as the many television shows created to cash in on the Sixties spy craze, such as *The Man From UNCLE* and, of course, *Mission: Impossible*."



» [C64] Unlike most other Eighties platformers, the items in *Impossible Mission* are hidden behind other objects.

A less obvious influence led Dennis to randomise the order of his spy platformer's levels, with the hope of discouraging repetition and encouraging thoughtful play. "All of the randomisation in *Impossible Mission* was inspired by the old terminal game *Rogue*," Dennis explains, "and it made the game a little bit different every time you played. I didn't want a pattern game like *Pac-Man*, where there was a fixed sequence that players repeated mindlessly every time."

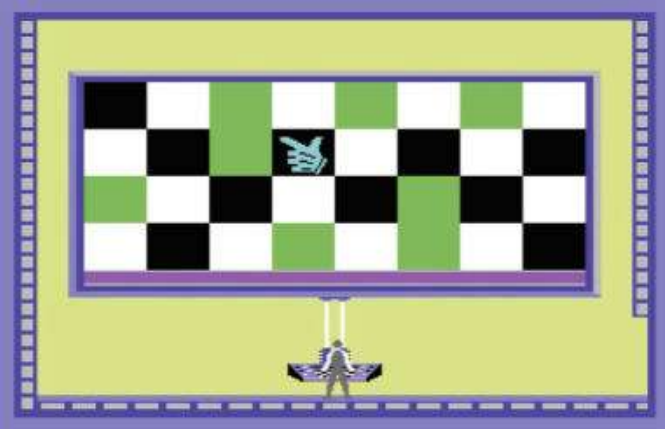
As well as arranging his game's stages in random order, Dennis also allowed them to be dipped in and out of rather than completing them and moving on. "It meant that part of *Impossible Mission* became assessing the difficulty of a given room and determining whether to solve it immediately or come back to it later," Dennis reasons. "One example

» *Impossible Mission II*'s levels were designed by Mihály Kenczler during annual leave from his main job.

» The fairly large team that worked on *Impossible Mission 2025* was managed by Stuart Whyte.

» Mark Cale designed and produced System 3's *Impossible Mission* remake and brought it to multiple systems.

» [C64] Nasty falls waste time in *Impossible Mission*, but they don't do the game's hero any harm.



» [C64] You're rewarded with power-ups if you do well in *Impossible Mission*'s Simon-inspired musical sub-game.

» [C64] *Impossible Mission*'s final challenge is to assemble puzzle pieces – and it's far from straightforward.

would be examining a room and concluding that you needed to put the robots to sleep in order to get through it, which may have meant you needed to go to some other room first to obtain the necessary 'snooze'."

In keeping with its random structure, Dennis randomised the threat of his game's foes – the aforementioned robots – although he coded some to appear harmless until approached. "Each robot was randomly assigned a behaviour at the start of the game," Dennis points out. "The purpose was to make them unpredictable, so when you encountered one for the first time you had to determine what kind of threat it posed before you knew how to evade it. The wider the variety of behaviours, the more uncertainty there was about what each one would or wouldn't do to you. So even the easy robots were only easy once you'd made sure they wouldn't chase you or zap you or both."

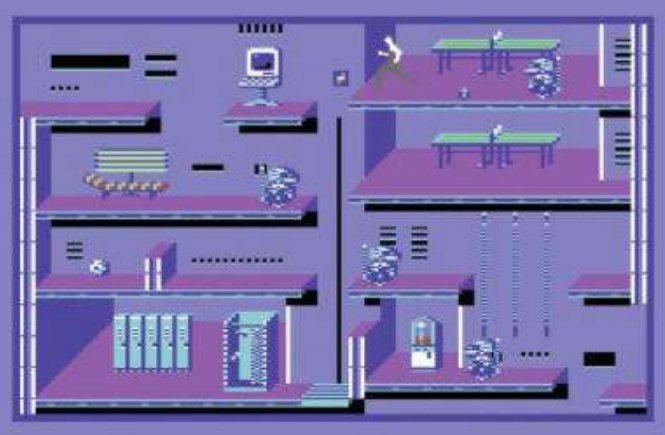
Interestingly, considering the live-action spies who had inspired his design, Dennis opted not to arm his game's agent, although he can see now how that might have been fun. "I'm not sure the effect would have been dramatic," Dennis ponders. "There might have been times when you needed to traverse the same room more than once, and being able to eliminate a robot once and for all could have make that easier, but the biggest difference would have probably been the catharsis resulting from bashing an uppity droid!"

But rather than seeking revenge, Dennis tasked players with finding items, and he connected this to avoiding robots by prolonging searches for power-ups and password pieces. "The hope was that the searching mechanism would add an element of suspense," Dennis reflects. "Because depending on what kind of robot was nearby you might have to search a little, then run away, then come back and search some more. So you had to decide how long you dared search before making your getaway."

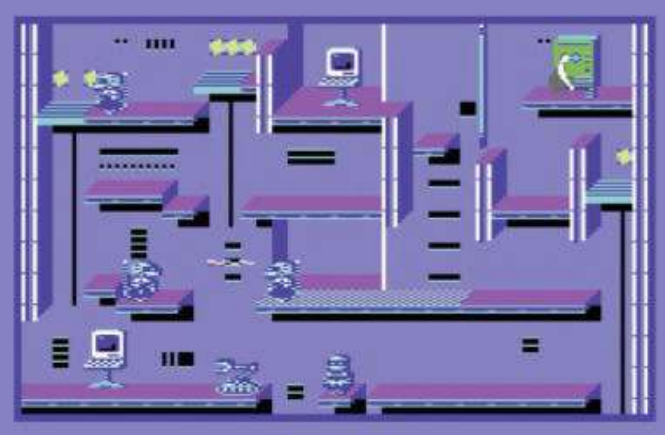
Keen to give players an alternative to searching for useful objects, Dennis looked to a popular toy to inform a musical sub-game that rewarded musically inclined players. "I've always been a fan of the game-within-a-game," Dennis beams. "They just broke things up and let you use a different part of your brain for a minute. The memory game in *Impossible Mission* was, of course, just a version of the old Milton Bradley game *Simon*, which was still fairly new at the time."

Although already highly innovative, Dennis further differentiated *Impossible Mission* by making its hero invulnerable to harm and placing him in a race against the clock. "It seemed novel for the game to use time rather than lives as its currency," Dennis argues. "It had to be completed in a fixed amount of time, and falling off a platform or otherwise 'dying' exacted a time penalty, so there was no fixed limit on the number of times you could die. Of course, if you expected to

> **"Part of Impossible Mission became assessing the difficulty of a given room and determining whether to solve it immediately or come back to it later"**
>
> **DENNIS CASWELL**



» [C64] Unlike the original, you can take out troublesome robots with landmines in *Impossible Mission II*.

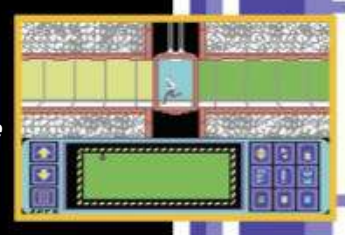


» [C64] The safe-cracking time-bombs in *Impossible Mission II* are one of the sequel's many innovations.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: AGENTS OF CHANGE

HOW THE OPERATIVES OF THE IMPOSSIBLE MISSION SERIES COMPARE

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION



Inspired by the sharply dressed spies of Sixties movies and TV shows, *Impossible Mission*'s Agent 4125 is a highly skilled athlete with a talent for uncovering secrets. He's also hard as nails, and so he loses time rather than lives when he's attacked by a robot or falls from a height.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 2025

The three operatives in *Impossible Mission 2025* are a former marine, a cybernetically enhanced gymnast and a T1000-inspired robot. You would think that they would have different abilities, but in practice they have a somersault move and can survive any threat – just like Agent 4125.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION (REMAKE)

Like *Impossible Mission 2025*, the remake of the original game lets you play as a male, female or android agent. As with its predecessor, the remake's operatives have identical abilities, but they're more skilled at somersaulting between platforms than the heroes of the earlier game.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

THE EVOLUTION OF IMPOSSIBLE MISSION'S MECHANICAL MENACES

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

You can't judge how dangerous a particular robot in *Impossible Mission* is based on its appearance, because models that look the same can pose a very different threat. Some are consistently docile, some are slow until approached and then speed up, and some fire bursts of electricity.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION II

Some of *Impossible Mission II*'s robots have the same defences as those in the original, but the sequel also has a raft of new metallic foes. As well as models that lay mines and push you off platforms, there are spring-like robots that you use as launch pads to reach high-up areas.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 2025

Impossible Mission 2025's robots are more like those in the original than the ones in the second game, in so much as they behave differently rather than having different abilities. As well as fast and slow-moving models, there are some that doggedly follow the game's agents around.

complete the game, the limit was probably zero or close to it."

This theory was proven soon after *Impossible Mission*'s release, as excited C64 owners snapped up the hit platformer. Dennis parted ways with its publisher Epyx, however, and so its follow-up was instead trusted to project manager Ron Fortier and developer Novotrade. "A sequel always would start with playing the original and brainstorming what could be expanded upon," Ron recalls. "I then delivered a top-line design document to Novotrade – it was likely under 20 pages in length. There was no level design per se at that point, but it described the overall gameplay and story arc."

After completing his design role on the follow-up, Ron then managed the production of the game by its Hungarian developers from publisher Epyx's Californian offices. "Because the game was developed in Budapest it was a challenge, as Hungary was still a Soviet state at that point. I primarily communicated with Stephen Friedman in California's bay area, and Novotrade's project manager in Budapest."

One further act of delegation saw Novotrade sub-contract the level design of *Impossible Mission*'s sequel to a freelance designer, as Mihály Kenczler recollects. "The project ran through the summer of 1986. I spent a part of my vacation designing the levels, and I remember I was rather mean with my designs. I had platforms sliding under low-hanging obstacles that pushed the player down, and challenges that required pixel-precise somersaults."

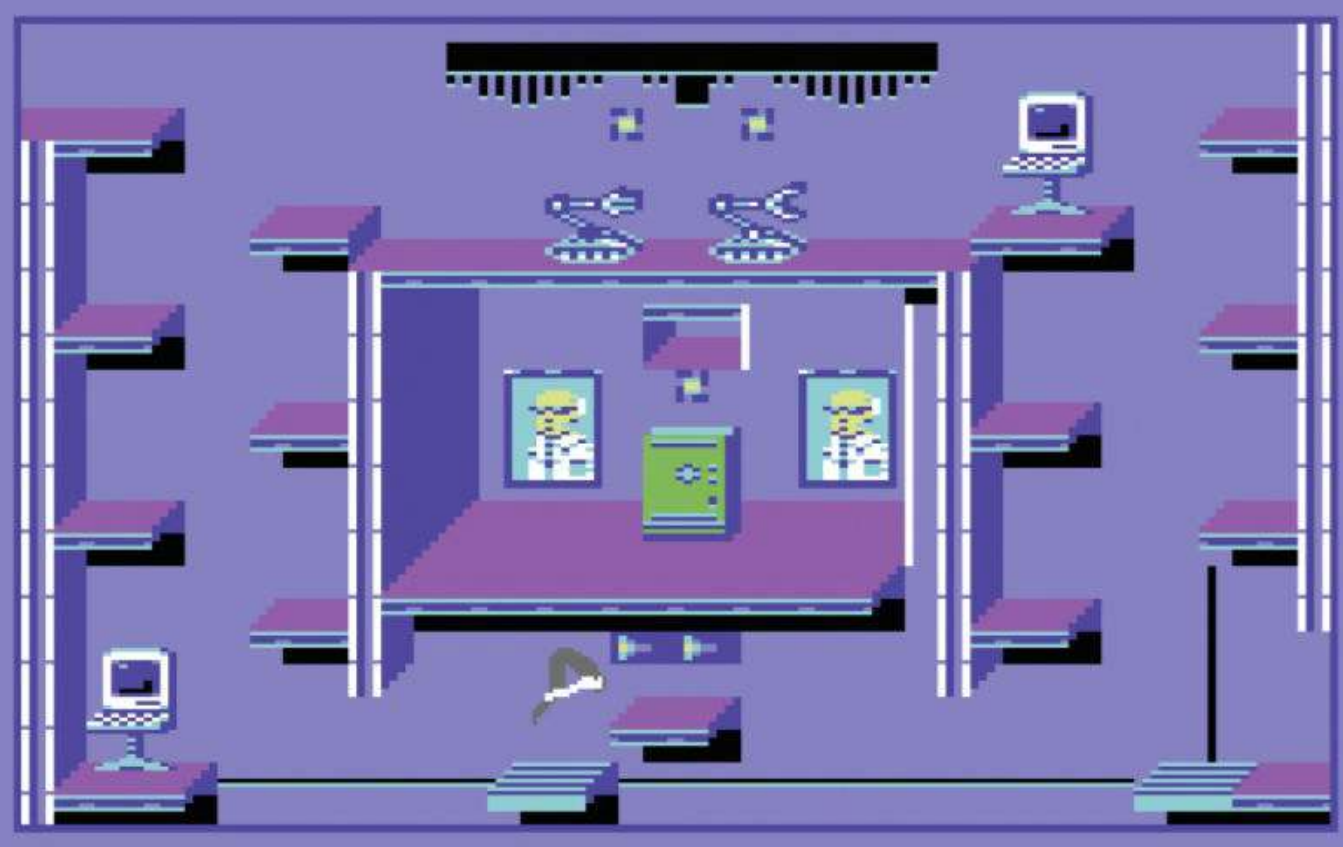
Rather than referencing the original game's layouts, Mihály used fresh mechanics that Ron had devised for its successor to give it a steadily increasing difficulty curve. "*Impossible Mission II* was a different game with different goals," Mihály reasons. "I was told I could do anything I liked with the levels. The other developers said to design easy rooms and tough rooms as well – and to take those to the extreme. But there was a reasonable time limit to find all of the codes and tunes, so the player could get accustomed to the difficulty."

> "Impossible Mission II was a different game with different goals. I was told I could do anything I liked with the levels"
> MIHÁLY KENCZLER

» [C64] You need to find a light switch power-up to illuminate *Impossible Mission II*'s dark rooms.

As well as assembling tune fragments, *Impossible Mission II* diverged from its predecessor further with objectives like blowing safes open and blowing up robots. "I personally liked the idea of the time bombs," Mihály grins, "and the land mines – because I thought the game should have something to combat those mean and furiously fast robots! Since there were also some that you could jump higher from, I certainly made at least one room which was only possible because of them."

As to the paradox of jumping off the heads of specific robotic foes to access high-up areas, Ron reckons the benefits to the gameplay outweighed the logic of the storyline. "I would guess that we wanted the player to think 'What did I miss? What



» [C64] The horizontally moving platforms designed for *Impossible Mission II* give the sequel its toughest challenges.

» [Amiga] There are guns in *Impossible Mission 2025* – unlike the original – but they only hold a single bullet.

» [Amiga] *Impossible Mission 2025*'s jetpack adds variety to the sequel, but its limited fuel restricts its use.

do I need to do to progress?'" Ron considers. "At that point, they would just start trying stuff, until they figured out that they had to use the enemy in order to progress."

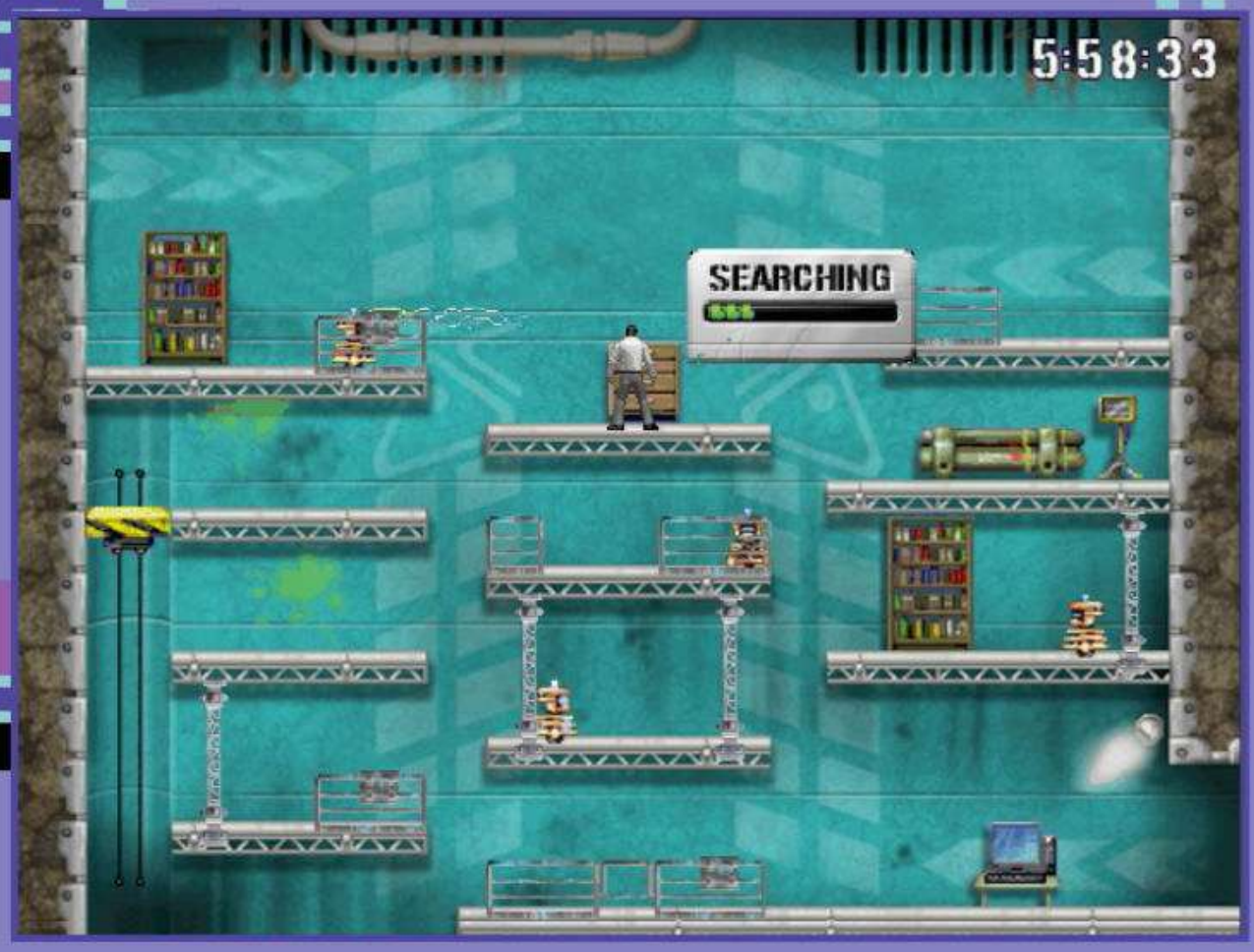
Additional evolutions from the original game included stages that had to be played in the dark, unless players first scoured other levels to find a light bulb power-up. "It just added variety," Ron reflects, "and games were always more entertaining when they weren't a straight line. Players liked when they are presented with an obstacle, and there was absolute satisfaction when that challenge was overcome."

When it came out on the C64, *Impossible Mission II* sold well and was ported to numerous systems. Six years later, after 8-bit gaming had waned, Microprose producer Stuart Whyte was asked to deliver a 16-bit follow-up. "The original *Impossible Mission* was a classic," Stuart enthuses. "It was all about the animation – that was really beautiful. But *Impossible Mission 2025* was a SNES and Mega Drive title – initially, and because those systems were 16-bit you could push them that bit more, so we really wanted to next gen-ify our sequel."

One aspect of *Impossible Mission 2025* where it outdid the original was its choice of three agents instead of one: a vigilante, a

» [Amiga] The ED-209 holo-disguise in *Impossible Mission 2025* stops robot attacks and safely walks over landmines

» [Amiga] Impressive acrobatics on display in *Impossible Mission 2025*.



» [PS2] Searching for items is far faster in the *Impossible Mission* remake than in the original.

» [PS2] The *Impossible Mission* update's level layouts are identical to those in *Impossible Mission*.

» [PS2] The robots in the remake are just as unforgiving as the original game's mechanical foes.

gymnast and a robot made from living metal. "I think the three agents thing was inspired by *Chaos Engine*," Stuart acknowledges. "I suspect the thinking was also about making feature improvements, and going from one character to a choice of three would have been part of that. I'd forgotten about the robot being liquid metal, but that was blatantly *Terminator 2*! We would have just been picking the zeitgeist as much as possible."

Besides its trio of player characters, the 16-bit follow-up's biggest change to the series came in the form of vast, scrolling stages in place of single-screen rooms. "The scrolling levels were just because we wanted to open them up and make them bigger," Stuart clarifies. "Single-screen platformers were of the 8-bit generation in our minds, and we had big ambitions. I don't think we delivered on them, unfortunately, but the scrolling levels were definitely an expectation."

The big ambitions for the sequel respected the original while extending its basic formula, and this led to fresh power-ups such as needle guns and armed jetpacks. "We wanted it to have the same DNA as the original game; we wanted players to search the objects and we wanted to keep the signature digitised speech," Stuart makes clear, "but we also felt that if we just replicated the original's gameplay on its own it wouldn't be sufficient to be a sequel. So that's why we added some more variety – more shoot-'em-up stuff."

"Impossible Mission 2025 was a SNES and Mega Drive title – initially, and so we really wanted to next gen-ify our sequel"
STUART WHYTE

On *Impossible Mission 2025*'s jetpack, Stuart reckons it took inspiration from Ultimate's *Jetpac* rather than the one

» [PS2] Like *Impossible Mission 2025*, the update lets you play as a male, female or android agent.

in the Bond flick *Thunderball*. "I honestly can't remember why we thought of adding a jetpack," Stuart admits, "but it definitely would have been the case that we were more influenced by games, and I'm sure we all cut our teeth playing Spectrum games!"

Another of the sequel's power-ups *did* take its lead from the movies – its holo-disguise looked just like *Robocop*'s ED-209, but sadly its weapons weren't loaded. "We had to make compromises," Stuart sighs. "We wanted to have all sorts of bosses and stuff in there too, but we had to rush to get the game finished on the SNES and Mega Drive in case we were going to manufacture them. In the end we didn't, but because we had a finished game on effectively the same processor as the Amiga and CD32 we put it out on them."

Met with lukewarm rather than scorching hot reviews, *Impossible Mission 2025* marked a short hiatus for the series. But in the late-Noughties, System 3 reinvented the original game with a nod to the Amiga follow-up. "*Impossible Mission 2025* having three agents might have influenced us," System 3 founder Mark Cale concedes. "We probably felt that it was going in the right direction, and that was the right way of doing it. But we were doing *Impossible Mission*, not *Impossible Mission 2025*. We were doing a remake of something that had proven to be a globally renowned game."

Like *Impossible Mission 2025* before it, the agents in System 3's update consisted of a male, female and robot operative, partly in order to reflect modern trends. "We felt it would be a good idea because there were female agents out there in the real world," Mark observes, "and if you looked at a lot of the movies, you had female superheroes and female characters that were bad arse. So we felt that it was relevant for the time."

But while it seemed like an obvious move to give players of the remake access to different agents, the thought of creating new enemies for the project made less sense. "We tried to update the *graphical look* of the robots, but to invent new ones, well how would that have affected playability?" Mark asks. "If they had different powers and had done certain things, well that wasn't where I wanted the game to go. I wanted it to be a little bit more faithful to the original."

While keeping its robot designs intact, System 3's new take on *Impossible Mission* also addressed the original game's less forgiving aspects. "One of the things that was frustrating in *Impossible Mission* was standing there waiting and waiting and waiting," Mark reviews, "and I felt that was one of the weak points of the game. So we just tweaked that a little bit. I also thought solving the puzzles was just so bloody difficult, and that people needed a little bit of help on that. But those were really the only elements that we changed in terms of assisting the player."

The reaction to the *Impossible Mission* update was such that it was later ported from the systems it was designed for to consoles from the next two generations. Asked for his thoughts, Dennis Caswell is just happy that his original game hasn't been forgotten. "I've now been away from the game business for longer than I ever spent making games, and it would never occur to me to revise, expand, or otherwise revisit the design of *Impossible Mission*," Dennis explains. "It was more a stroke of luck than a stroke of genius. The design was haphazard, but the graphics and animation were pretty good by the standards of the day, and the combination of game elements was novel, as was the digitised speech. So I'm just flattered that anyone still remembers it."

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: LEVELLING UP

FROM RANDOM ROOMS AND FORTRESS TOWERS TO SPRAWLING STAGES

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

You never know what to expect from *Impossible Mission*, because the order you encounter its underground levels in is entirely random. Added to that, the abilities of the robots on each stage differs from game to game. That said, the overall challenge of the levels is always the same.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION II

Unlike the original, *Impossible Mission II*'s levels appear in a set order, but there are many more of them. The stages are grouped in towers that make up a fortress, and each one is protected by a security code system. The sequel's levels are also far tougher than its predecessor's.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 2025

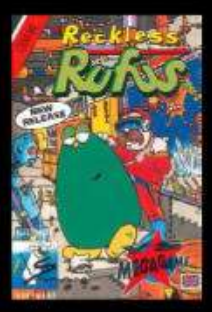
In a break from the first two *Impossible Mission* titles, the 2025-set follow-up has vast scrolling levels instead of fixed screen stages. The result is that the sequel feels less compartmentalised; it also means that you don't know what's just above or below you until you get there.

THE MAKING OF

RECKLESS RUFUS

BY 1992, IT WAS ALMOST OVER FOR 8-BIT COMPUTERS. WHILE PUBLISHERS WERE RELEASING GAMES, MAINLY ON BUDGET, THEY WERE OFTEN UNINSPIRING LICENSED PRODUCTS AIMED AT A YOUNGER GENERATION. HOWEVER, ONE MAN BELIEVED AN ORIGINAL AND WELL-DESIGNED GAME COULD STILL BE A SUCCESS

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

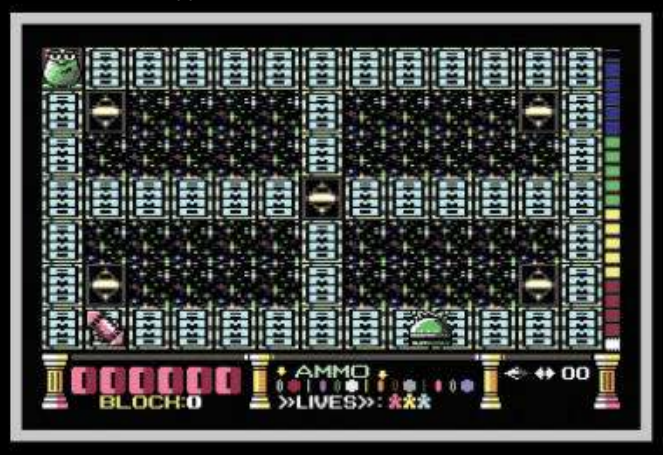


IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ALTERNATIVE SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** MIKE BERRY
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM
- **GENRE:** ARCADE PUZZLE

Mike Berry, the creator of *Reckless Rufus*, wanted his game to be different from the many budget titles that were already available. "The early Nineties seemed to be dominated by TV or movie-based games," he begins. "And even though there were a few exceptions, I thought most of them sucked." With the 8-bit market on the wane, the target audience was also changing, hence Alternative's licensing of properties such as *Thomas The Tank Engine* and *Fireman Sam*. Mike was having none of it. "I wanted to produce something fairly original, but I knew a lot of the software houses at the time wanted to play it safe with tried and tested formulas. I kicked around a few ideas before coming up with the concept of *Reckless Rufus*, or as it was known originally, *Awesome Dude*." The inspiration for *Reckless Rufus*' gameplay came from veteran C64 coder Tony Crowther and his game *Bombuzal*. "With the routines and ideas I already had, and after playing *Bombuzal* again for a couple of hours, the design ideas for *Rufus* were all but set in stone," explains Mike. A huge fan of the Commodore computer – his favourite game is the space adventure classic *Elite* – Mike juggled a day job and young son while programming what would become *Reckless Rufus*.

» [C64] Many of the later screens are deviously plotted.



The strange green being known as Rufus has lived up to his sobriquet and stowed aboard a huge mining ship. Having been discovered by the ship's robotic guardians, Rufus is despatched to the nearby planet Killey. His task: collect the valuable crystals lying around, dodge aliens and negotiate the many traps that form each screen. Of the tiles on each level, some have a number which represents how many safe hops Rufus can generate from that tile onwards. Careful planning and some experimentation is needed if Rufus is to collect the crystals and win his passage back to Earth. Fortunately, he's been given a laser pistol, but with ammunition limited, our globular hero will soon find himself out of shots should he get too carefree with his gun. "I did all the original game design, coding and most of the background graphics," says Mike, "but as I suck at music, and couldn't afford the likes of Rob Hubbard, my cousin David Green wrote the tune and SFX." Mike's friend Roy Fielding also helped out with sprite design and animation. Aged 30, and with only one other commercial game under his belt, Mike himself was late to the games programming party, although he had uploaded a few demos to the UK's 'mini-internet' of the time, Compunet.

> **"I WANTED TO CRAM AS MANY LEVELS AS I COULD INTO A SINGLE LOAD"**
> **MIKE BERRY**

In addition to its devilish puzzles, *Reckless Rufus* is a huge game – there are 130 screens to explore. "I created a level designer which enabled me to create screens in just a few minutes", Mike says. "Doing it the old-fashioned way with a pencil and some graph paper would have taken too long for me – I was always looking for the quick and lazy way of doing things!" Inevitably, some of the screens are a little, erm, familiar. "That's probably a fair assessment," admits Mike. "I wanted to cram as many levels as I could into a single load. I'm

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BOING! (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1989

SAVAGE PLATFORMS (DEMO)
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1996

IRON FISH (DEMO)
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1987

» *Reckless Rufus* coder Mike Berry.

» Mike and a friend.

» [C64] With some floor tiles pushing Rufus in a particular direction, a lot of care is needed.

not a fan of multi-load games, especially if you didn't have the luxury of a disk drive and were stuck loading games from tape."

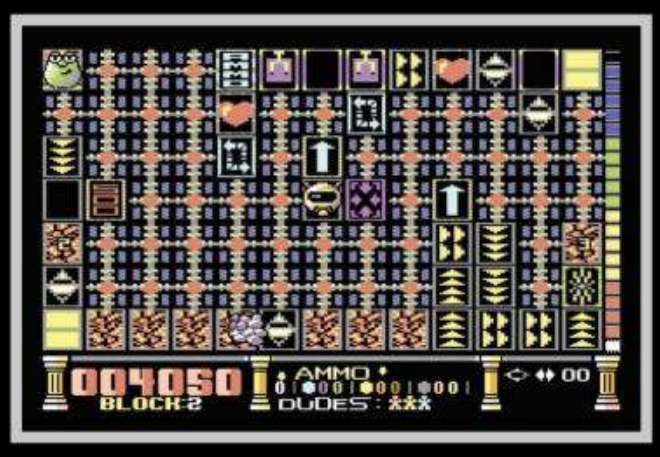
Despite being aimed at a younger audience, *Reckless Rufus* is not an easy game. As well as working out which route Rufus can take, the player has to constantly deal with the fast-moving aliens that harass the poor protagonist. Explains Mike, "The only changes I made to the demo I sent out to software houses was the name and making the baddies a little more annoying. I think changing the difficulty was a mistake – the puzzle aspect is hard enough, without having to deal with the aliens trying to smash into you. Having said that, the alien patterns are pretty easy to work out once you get used to them."

Reckless Rufus took Mike around seven months to complete before he sent off the aforementioned demo to several prominent UK games publishers. "Alternative were pretty quick off the mark in getting back to me," he recalls. "I had two or three rejection letters from other publishers, and two other software houses were interested, but by that time I'd already signed up to Alternative." Having supplied level maps and a trained version of *Reckless Rufus* to assist the Amstrad and Spectrum coder, *Reckless Rufus* was released by Alternative on three formats, the Commodore version scoring impressively for a budget game in the pages of *Zzap!64* magazine. "Just a few percentage points short of a sizzler award!" exclaims Mike. "I remember buying that copy of *Zzap* and having a stupid-looking smile on my face for a week!"

So a critical and commercial success, but would he have done anything differently? "Maybe I'd have done away with the aliens altogether and used the sprites in some other way," Mike muses. "And one thing I would have definitely changed is the number of screens you have to complete in order to get a level start code. I wish I'd made it one code for every level instead of every ten."

With *Reckless Rufus* a winner, you'd have thought this was the start of a games career for the 30-something. Sadly, despite a handful of demos, it remains the pinnacle of Mike's games career as he continued his day job as a PC engineer. "But [coding *Reckless Rufus*] was most definitely some of the best times of my life. To me, the mid-Eighties and early Nineties were the golden years of the Commodore 64 and 8-bit era in general. I spent almost every spare moment I had coding, creating new stuff and mixing with fellow retro addicts. I'd happily go right back to those days right now!" ✱

Our thanks to Mike for his time.



» [C64] A handful of levels in and *Reckless Rufus* is getting very tricky.

» [C64] Game over man! It's game over!

"I THINK CHANGING THE DIFFICULTY WAS A MISTAKE – THE PUZZLE ASPECT IS HARD ENOUGH, WITHOUT HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE ALIENS TRYING TO SMASH INTO YOU"
MIKE BERRY

CONVERSION CAPERS

Alternative charged regular programmer Paul Griffiths with the Z80 conversions of *Reckless Rufus*. How do they stand alongside the Commodore original?

COMMODORE 64

The original version devised and coded by Mike Berry is the best despite the nagging aliens that incessantly pester poor Rufus. With sound by Mike's cousin and help with graphics from a friend, there's a true bedroom coder feel to the game's creation, ten years after the phenomenon first began. A challenging and compulsive puzzle game that proved there was still life in the C64.

AMSTRAD CPC

While it's a tad slower than the C64 game, the bright display and robust sound effects combine to make *Reckless Rufus* a real treat for Amstrad owners often starved of good-quality budget games. The same complaints about those pesky aliens surface, and with Rufus still only able to fire one bullet at a time, it can be frustrating. Nevertheless, it's a polished and fun conversion.

ZX SPECTRUM

Coded alongside the Amstrad version by Paul Griffiths, the Spectrum version retains all the charm of the original, and – unfortunately – its steep difficulty thanks to those constant aliens. The combination of puzzle game and shoot-'em-up is a solid one, but with the enemies spawning constantly, there's little respite. It looks good, however, and remains a genuinely entertaining game.

THE HISTORY OF ROLAND

Amstrad's mascot introduced himself via games bundled for free with the Amstrad CPC. So why would players who went on to check out all eight of his commercially-released titles still struggle to pick him out of a police lineup?

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

» Roland was named after Amstrad's group technology consultant, Roland Perry

Unlike Mario, Sonic, Lara and the myriad other mascots and iconic characters that have lit up the gaming landscape over the decades, it's difficult to conjure a single image of Roland, the character introduced to help launch the Amstrad CPC 464.

Some saw him as the computer's unofficial mascot and the games were played by tens of thousands of computer users. And yet we say 'him', when we could so easily say 'it'. For as well as taking on a human form, Roland was once little more than a block with arms, legs and a smiling face, and, in one game, our shapeshifting hero Roland was actually a flea.

What Roland amounted to was a series of games that seemed to have been thought up on the hoof. Indeed, Amstrad's software division, Amsoft, appeared quite content with sticking the *Roland* branding on any game it felt it could get away with so there was no strategy, no thought given to consistency, and it didn't matter how the character looked or how the games played.

"There was no particular reason for the Roland sprites to be similar," argues Roland Perry who was, at the time, Amstrad's group technology consultant. So why is the series interesting if it was such a mishmash of genres and styles? Quite simply because Roland helped Amstrad establish itself in Spain.

To understand how, we need to go back to 1983 and look at a fledgling Spanish computer company called

» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland In The Caves* was set in 2464 CE – when the character had been given the power to mutate into alien forms.

Indescomp which published games and hardware for the ZX Spectrum, VIC-20, Commodore 64 and MSX. Founded by José Luis Domínguez, a fiercely ambitious entrepreneur, the tiny outfit had already looked to introduce Acorn computers into Spain only to find it couldn't shift them there. José Luis was, however, having better luck with software thanks to having some notable talent on his books.

> "There was no particular reason for the Roland sprites to be similar"
> ROLAND PERRY

One of them was programmer Paco Suárez. "One day, I created a simulation of a parabolic shot [an experiment with projectile motion] as an example of how the ZX81 could be put to educational use," Paco tells us. This led to the creation of an intriguing game called *La Pulga* (which translates to *The Flea* in English).

Paco's concept involved helping a stranded flea leap its way to the top of a gorge. Players would determine whether the flea should hop left or right, then judge how strong the leap should be. "Seeing my simulation on screen, it had occurred to me that it might be fun if I found a way to control the force of the shot," Paco explains. Gamers also had to contend with slippy ledges and a flying dragon that would swoop on the flea if players hung around for too long. The game proved addictive, innovative and quirky.

As if to demonstrate how much thought went into the game, Paco was joined by mathematician Paco Portalo, forming an internal two-man team at Indescomp known as Paco & Paco. "We were old friends and we saw each other frequently in Badajoz, the city where we lived," Paco continues. "He was interested in using his ZX81 for academic work and we talked a lot about computers, although we had different approaches and interests. When I started developing *La Pulga*, it was a coincidence that we ended up working together."

The partnership worked a treat and, when *La Pulga* was released, it became a best seller. "The game was the first to be marketed in Spain for personal computers. Up to then, games were being made for arcade machines, Paco says. This brought the game to the attention of publishers elsewhere. Rod Cousens, founder of Quicksilva, snapped it up for the UK market and renamed it *Bugaboo (The Flea)*. Quicksilva also took on board another Indescomp game called *Fred*.

Developed on the ZX Spectrum by Fernando Rada, Camilo Cela and Carlos Granados, *Fred* was set inside the pyramid of Tootiecarmoon. It starred an Indiana Jones-like archeologist who would explore six procedurally generated levels, collect treasure and leave without falling prey to various enemies from spiders to vampires. *Fred* also sold very well.

Despite this, José Luis still wanted to make his mark with hardware, believing there was more money to be had in distributing a popular system than in the creation of games. He'd heard that Amstrad – better known for its cheap all-in-one hi-fis – was about to launch its debut computer so he had been constantly calling its technical and manufacturing director, Bob Watkins, asking for a meeting, only to be rebuffed. That was

» [Amstrad CPC] Roland's decision to turn himself into a flea in *Roland In The Caves* meant he became easy prey.

CONVERSION CAPERS

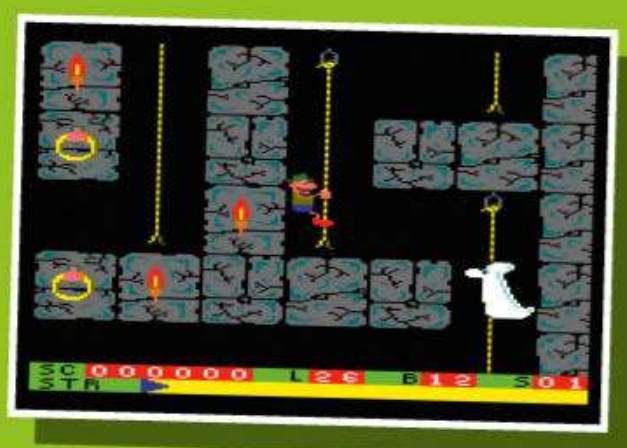
ROLAND ON THE ROPES APPEARED AS FRED ON OTHER COMPUTERS

ZX SPECTRUM

Fred's flickering graphics and a set of rudimentary sound effects threatened to spoil the fun of exploring the Pyramid of Tootiecarmoon. But a well-animated sprite complete with a recoiling gun, a busy set of mazes, a map, a simple yet clear colour scheme and progressive difficulty made for some rather fun tomb raiding.

COMMODORE 64

The Commodore 64 version feels faster and more polished. You can select a difficulty level, you're told how many points you'll gain for collecting each item and there's even some in-game music (that rapidly becomes annoying). The maze feels less claustrophobic too and there are bombs to blow your way to the next maze.



AMSTRAD CPC

Renamed *Roland On The Ropes* for the CPC, we were confused by the odd order for redefining the keys but we rather enjoyed this version overall. It felt a little easier than on the other systems and it had great use of colour, fast action and a rendition of the C64 music confined to the intro screen. The graphics were detailed but flickered like the ZX Spectrum version.

MORE FROM AMSOFT

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY: AMSOFT HAD THE LOT

HARRIER ATTACK

Created by Durell Software programmer Mike Richardson and inspired by the Falklands War, this side-scrolling *Scramble* clone involved bombing enemies and avoiding incoming fire. Bundled with CPC 464s, it ended up in the hands of 100,000 Amstrad gamers. Durell founder Bob White recalls Alan Sugar as being "perfunctory, sharp but straight".

SORCERY+

Not only the finest Amsoft game but one of the best arcade titles to bless the CPC, *Sorcery+* (a sequel to *Sorcery*) looked amazing thanks to its colourful, detailed Mode 0 graphics and fast, fluid animation. Since it was disc-only, the developers were also able to push the number of screens to explore from a paltry 40 to a much more impressive 75.

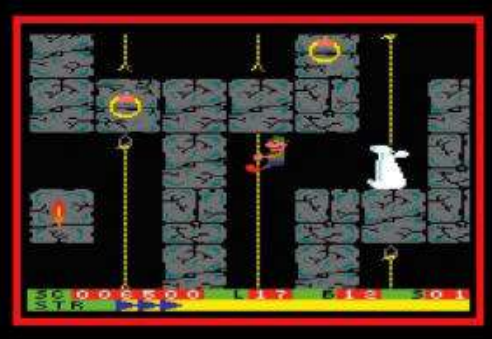
QABBALAH

"Daren White and I wrote this isometric projection, 3D game but it wasn't well received," recalls Gem Software boss John Line. Trouble is, it looked nice enough but it was a tricky title (regardless of the difficulty level you choose). That's because items were hidden a little too cleverly which simply proved frustrating when you tried to find them all.

PYJAMARAMA

Mikro-Gen's *Pyjamarama* took its graphics straight from the Spectrum version but as multi-screen action-adventures go, it was still reasonably good fun. The game starred Wally Week who had already appeared in *Automania*, with players having to collect and use objects in order to wake him from a nightmare so he wouldn't miss his shift at the car factory.

» [Amstrad CPC] Originally known as *Fred, Roland On The Ropes* was the one which inspired Alan Sugar to name the Roland character.



» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland On The Ropes* had players shooting through the tombs – although gunfire would only scare, not kill, the ghosts.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland Goes Digging* was the first game in the series to be created by Gem Software.

until he told Bob that *Bugaboo (The Flea)* had gone down a storm, soaring to number one not just in Spain but in the UK too. Bob's ears quickly perked up.

Bob asked José Luis if the game could be converted to the Amstrad CPC 464. José Luis said it could. A meeting was arranged on the provision there'd be no talk of selling the CPC in Spain and so José Luis took a cab to Amstrad's factory at Garman Road, Tottenham. After settling into one of the building's many tiny offices, Bob demanded to know how long it would take Indescomp to convert *Bugaboo (The Flea)* to the CPC. José Luis told him a month. This earned him the loan of a prototype CPC which he took back to Madrid.

> "I'd created the graphics of the original myself but for the CPC I needed help because I had little time to do it"
> PACO SUÁREZ

When José Luis told the team how long he'd agreed, jaws dropped ("I remember the time limit was tight because Amstrad wanted the game to go on the market at the same time as the machine," Paco says). But the lure of writing a launch title for Amstrad's new computer was incentive enough so the team soon cracked on.

To save time, *Bugaboo (The Flea)*'s opening sequence was dropped. "This had been added to the original versions because we were inspired by the movies and thought film had some analogies with videogames," says Paco. But it wasn't integral to the game.

What was retained however was the game's full scrolling and the timer. "Given the simplicity of the concept, it seemed to me that counting time was the natural way to measure success in the game and scrolling the screen was necessary," Paco recalls. The CPC game also became more colourful thanks to the work of artist Juanjo Redondo. "I'd created the graphics of the original myself but for the CPC I needed help because I had little time to do it," Paco adds. "Fortunately I was able to count on Juanjo, a good friend and artist. He made all of the designs on graph paper and I patiently transferred them to the computer."

Unbeknown to Amstrad, the Indescomp team, with the assistance of Paco Menéndez, also worked on porting *Fred* to the CPC turning it into a more colourful game that made good use of the CPC's low-res Mode 0 which could display 16 colours from a palette of 27. "I would work on *La Pulga* at night and, in the morning, the guys who were doing *Fred* would take over on the prototype," Paco reveals.

Converting the games to the CPC had, as promised, only taken a month but in that time Amstrad had moved to new headquarters in Brentwood. When the games were ready, José Luis called Bob, insisting he fly to London to give a demonstration of them in person. After

OH MUMMY

Another game by Gem Software, *Oh Mummy* had distinct echoes of the arcade titles, *Amidar* and *Pac-Man*. Set across five levels of a pyramid, players needed to retrieve treasure and Royal Mummies by encircling boxes with your footprints and avoiding the clutches of awoken guardians. Simple to look at but surprisingly deep. Awful music, though.

SULTAN'S MAZE

Amsoft picked up this Gem Software game a year after it was originally released, bundling it with the CPC 464. We include it here not because it's a great game – it isn't, by any stretch – but because of its ambition in trying to produce a 3D maze game using the BASIC language. Amstrad computer software magazine, *Amtix*, gave it the low score of 27%.

THE GALACTIC PLAGUE

Again, this is an inclusion that doesn't reflect quality but is notable for its roots. In this case, *The Galactic Plague* was the work of Paco Suarez, the one who inadvertently kicked off the *Roland* series of games. Snapping a screenshot for our dear readers was no mean feat. Fast and fluid it may be but, boy, was it easy to get killed when playing it.

BRIDGE-IT

Epicsoft – the software house that made *Roland On The Run* – developed a game that divided opinion. But for your correspondent, this puzzler was almost pre-*Lemmings*, setting your nerves on edge by asking you to help people get from one house to another by ensuring four bridges were lowered at the right time. Will you dare to up the difficulty level?

arriving, he asked that Lord Sugar be present too. Bob reluctantly agreed to ask his boss and the Amstrad founder arrived looking a tad annoyed.

José Luis tried to load *Bugaboo (The Flea)*. It wouldn't work. He tried again and, this time, it thankfully sprung into action. He then announced his second game, *Fred*, and Lord Sugar liked what he saw. "The character would jump all over the place," Lord Sugar told us in issue 176. "So we named him after Roland Perry." That game promptly became *Roland On The Ropes* while *Bugaboo (The Flea)* was renamed *Roland In The Caves*. Lord Sugar told Bob to sort the royalty agreement and turned on his heels, about to leave.

José Luis knew royalties were no guarantee of riches, however, particularly when developing a game for a computer that wasn't even on sale and one that he hadn't actually seen in the flesh. There was no way of knowing how popular the computer was going to be, never mind how many games Indescomp could end up selling. But José Luis had been yearning to meet Lord Sugar and it was time to put his plan into action. Taking a deep breath, he told the Amstrad man, "I'm not selling you the games."

Lord Sugar was flummoxed. "No, I will give them to you as a present," José Luis continued, explaining that he'd only wanted to show that the Indescomp team were hard workers, talented and honest. All he wanted in return was a promise from Lord Sugar to bear Indescomp in mind if he ever wanted to enter the Spanish market.

» The free pack of games that came with an Amstrad CPC 464 including *Roland In The Caves* and *Roland On The Ropes*. Credit: Nich, CPC Wiki.

This led José Luis and his translator to Lord Sugar's office where the two bosses sought to work out how many Amstrad CPC 464s could be sent to Spain in time for Christmas.

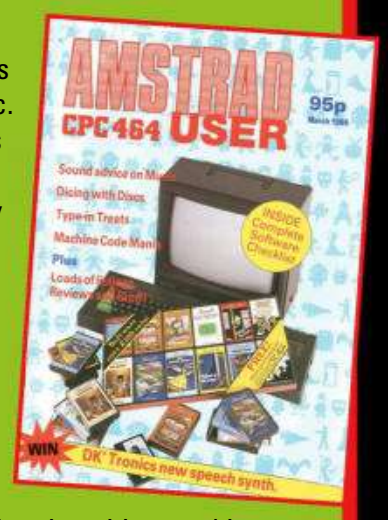
In that moment, José Luis had played a blinder. Indescomp was about to play a big part in establishing Amstrad in Spain and the move would prove to be hugely successful. What happened next is another story for another day but it was all thanks to the first two games that would make up the *Roland* series.

As for Roland Perry, he insists he wasn't too fussed that the games were being named after him. "You have to remember that at this stage of the Amstrad CPC project, we were still external contractors and we didn't expect more than 100,000 computers to be sold in the first year, and maybe none in the second year," Roland tells us. "Having games named after me wasn't a huge thing to get excited about."

ROLAND GOES TYPING

TWO OTHER ROLAND GAMES REQUIRED A BIT MORE EFFORT

The *Roland* story didn't stop with the eight games released on tape and disc. Amsoft also published its own magazine, *Amstrad Computer User* (originally called *CPC464 User*, then *Amstrad CPC464 User*) and this publication included two *Roland* games within its pages.



The first was *Roland Takes A Running Jump*, presented by journalist Peter Green as a masterclass in writing machine code over four issues from November 1985 to March 1986 (one month was missed for some reason). The code was attributed to Keith Wilson and Marcus Sharp and it had players leaping around Amstrad's office, avoiding boss Alan Sugar and collecting three-inch floppy discs.

"Amsoft didn't mind us using the *Roland* name and I'm guessing it felt like a good idea at the time," recalls the magazine's then-editor Simon Rockman. "There was no ownership of *Roland*, though – it wasn't like *Horace*, for instance. The *Roland* games in general were a mixed bunch and they just had the *Roland* name slapped on them."

Simon was also editor when the magazine included its second *Roland* game: a type-in listing for *Roland In The Haunted House* in issue 22 in 1985. Blatantly referred to in the mag as a version of *Pac-Man*, it was quite faithful – right down to the colour and shape of the main sprite.

Written by C Wakelin, it also ended up on a compilation cassette in Spain called *Your Computer 3*, released in 1986. This time it was renamed *Arnold In The Haunted House* – a reference to Amstrad's internal codename for the CPC. "Roland was also an anagram of Arnold," Simon says. The game was otherwise unchanged.

Roland On The Ropes and *Roland In The Caves* became part of a 12-game bundle given away for free with every CPC 464 purchase. "There were advertisements in the magazines that used the image of the games to promote the machine," Paco says.

Amsoft, headed by Peter Roback, then sought to add to the series by encouraging other software developers to create further titles. *Roland Goes Digging*, for instance, was developed by freelance programmer Chris Hunt on behalf of Gem Software. A riff on Universal's *Space Panic*, it saw Roland – now working as a labourer – clearing a building site of invading aliens.

Players would help him dig holes into which the creatures would fall. Once they became trapped, he'd dispatch them with his shovel while keeping an eye on the falling oxygen levels, making it a race against time. Amsoft whacked it onto a cassette for £8.95 but *Amstrad Action* wasn't too impressed. "Dropping aliens through holes is all there is to do", it told readers in a review in issue 1, awarding it just 54%.

Not to be deterred, Amsoft then commissioned Computersmith to make *Roland Ahoy!* for the CPC 464. This was one of the better games in the series, turning our hero into a ruthless pirate in a rip-roaring Caribbean adventure. It gave players four lives and tasked them with collecting treasure from Golden Harbour that could then be shipped to a hidden cave. After avoiding sea monsters and rocks, Roland needed to nick a few cannon balls, then set sail for a town packed with merchants to load up with some ill-gotten treasure before burying it in the desert.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland Ahoy!* – or *Roland A L'Arordage* as it was known in France – starred our hero as a pirate.

Amstrad Computer User magazine said it was "notable for some of the fastest machine code graphics yet seen" and reckoned it managed to "raise the game to a standard that underlines the limitations of lesser computers". That couldn't be said of Epicsoft's contribution to the *Roland* series, however. Its game, *Roland On The Run*, was little short of a travesty.

For this, Epicsoft produced its own version of *Frogger* but reversed the usual run of play so that instead of going from bottom to top, the player had to get the character from top to bottom. Interestingly enough, the starting point was a train which could be accelerated and decelerated until the player decided it was time to leap from a carriage. They'd then hitch a ride on two passing trucks before squirrelling themselves away in a hideout.

» [Amstrad CPC] You had to keep your wits about you in *Roland Ahoy!* as the monster would chase you through the sea.

» [Amstrad CPC] Arguably the worst of all the games, *Roland On The Run* was a riff on *Frogger*.

Trouble is, *Roland On The Run* was dull. The graphics didn't change between levels. The audio was a mass of irritating white noise. It became so notorious that issue 30 of *Amstrad Action* magazine apologised for a series of mistakes in an article about spreadsheets by saying "those responsible for the mess-ups have been forced to play *Roland On The Run* til they begged for mercy". Even then, it seemed a rather harsh punishment.

Better was *Roland Goes Square Bashing* even though it was undoubtedly inspired by another game, the 1982 classic *Q*bert*. Spread over 20 screens, this 3D puzzler asked players to work out a path across a bunch of tiles with Roland having to touch each one at least once. As soon as he landed on a square, it would begin to vanish beneath him forcing the player to keep moving. Developer Simon Francis did a fine job on the game but if there was ever evidence that Amsoft wasn't really fussed about consistency, this was it. Roland was a mere square block this time around.

So how did *Roland Goes Square Bashing* come about? Unfortunately, finding out has proven extremely difficult. Although this Amsoft game is credited as copyright of Durell Software – both in the game and on the cassette inlay – the company's founder Robert White was genuinely surprised when **Retro Gamer** approached him. "Sorry, but you've got the wrong company," he said. "Durell never wrote any *Roland* games."

» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland Goes Square Bashing* was developed by Durrel Software… or was it?

Baffled, we probed further. "Simon briefly worked with Durell but I have absolutely no recollection of any *Roland* games." Robert replied. The best explanation Robert could offer is that Simon may have gone "off piste and done this without my knowledge". "As far as I'm aware *Harrier Attack* was the only title we sold to Amsoft," Robert continued. "Simon never showed *Roland Goes Square Bashing* to me which is hardly surprising as he would have known that it wasn't a Durell type of game. Amsoft definitely didn't pay Durell anything for it."

Thankfully, the final two Roland games have a more straightforward history: *Roland In Time* and *Roland In Space*. Developed by Gem Software and following on from *Roland Goes Digging*, this pair finally brought some consistency to the series insofar as they actually used the same character twice (Roland wore a little blue hat, a red top and yellow trousers and travelled around in a red phone box). But how did Gem Software get involved with the franchise?

"A very good friend of mine had started a computer shop and was 'well in' with a distributor in Welwyn Garden City," begins Gem Software founder John Line. "I was writing games in BASIC for fun, found that the distributor was interested and resigned from my job as a programmer at Lloyd's Register Of Shipping to set up Gem Software (Bishops Stortford) Limited along with my wife, Sandra."

At first, Gem developed games for the ZX Spectrum and Camputers Lynx, a British 8-bit home computer released in March 1983 that barely lasted a year. The machine was blighted by poor sales of just 30,000 units causing Camputers to go into receivership, owing John's company more than £20,000. As a result, Barclays Bank ended up freezing Gem's business account and took the Lines to court for possession of their home. Gem ended up going into liquidation but John and Sandra set up a new company Gem Software Limited and it ended up on Amsoft's radar.

> "Simon briefly worked with Durell but I have absolutely no recollection of any Roland games"
> ROBERT WHITE

ARISE SIR FRED

HOW ROLAND SNEAKILY CARRIED ON HIS LEGACY

Amsoft gave up on the *Roland* series in 1985 but its spirit lived on in three other games. *Doors Of Doom*, for instance, was a *Roland* game in all but name, starring a similar looking character to the one which appeared in *Roland In Time* and *Roland In Space*: the one that wore a blue hat, red top and fabulous yellow trousers.

"*Doors Of Doom* carried on the theme," affirms Gem Software boss John Line who is now considering porting all three games to Windows PCs. The other *Roland*-inspired titles were *Sir Fred* and *Poogaboo*.

Sir Fred was created as a sequel to *Fred* (or *Roland On The Ropes*) by a group of former Indescomp developers going by the name Made In Spain. *Poogaboo* was released by Opera Soft as a sequel to Bugaboo (The Flea), aka *Roland In The Caves*.

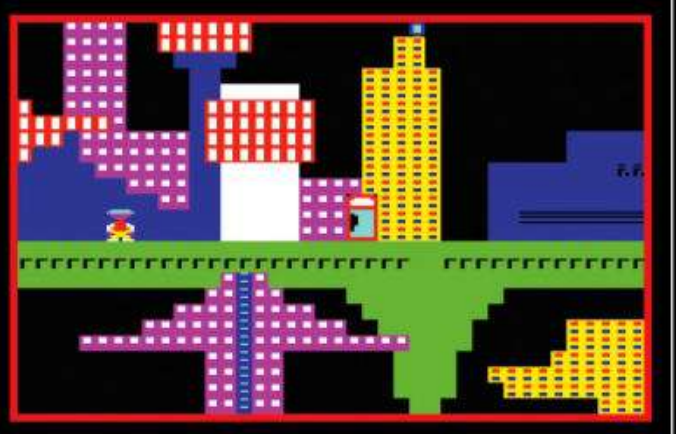
» [Amstrad CPC] There were 158 pieces of a weapon to collect in *Roland In Space*, spread across different planets.

"We were contacted by 'a company that was intending to bring out a games computer' and we were invited to attend a meeting in Brentwood where we and a number of other software houses signed an NDA before being introduced to the concept of the Amstrad CPC 464," John continues. "Roland had played some of our games on the Camputers Lynx and liked them so he suggested we become one of the software houses to get in on the ground floor."

John and Sandra agreed. They were introduced to the software house HiSoft that was producing a Z80 assembler for the machine called Devpac. Before the assembler was ready, they started writing "some fairy cruddy games in BASIC", John recalls. They were also introduced to Peter Roback. "Peter hit it off with Sandra and I right away and we became firm friends," says John. "So our games were written for publication under the Amsoft label with Peter and ourselves deciding on the titles, artwork and so on. It was seen as good marketing to add Roland to a few of the games we were making. Amsoft would take care of duplication, printing and packaging and they'd pay us a royalty on the number of our units they sold."

Roland In Time became one of the standout titles in the series. "I had one 'in-house' programmer working for me, Daren White, who was really a coder rather than a designer. He wrote some of the code and I did all the rest," John tells us. "I designed the game, created the graphics and then wrote the music but the first thing we had to do was port our development tools across to the CPC. This entailed converting our sprite designer, scenery designer and music studio which were all written in Z80 and 6502 Assembler – I still have the source code for all of them plus all the games somewhere. *Roland In Time* was an original game, however, so I wasn't able to port it from a different machine."

» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland In Space* was the only game which copied the look of a previous game in the series (taken directly from *Roland In Time*).



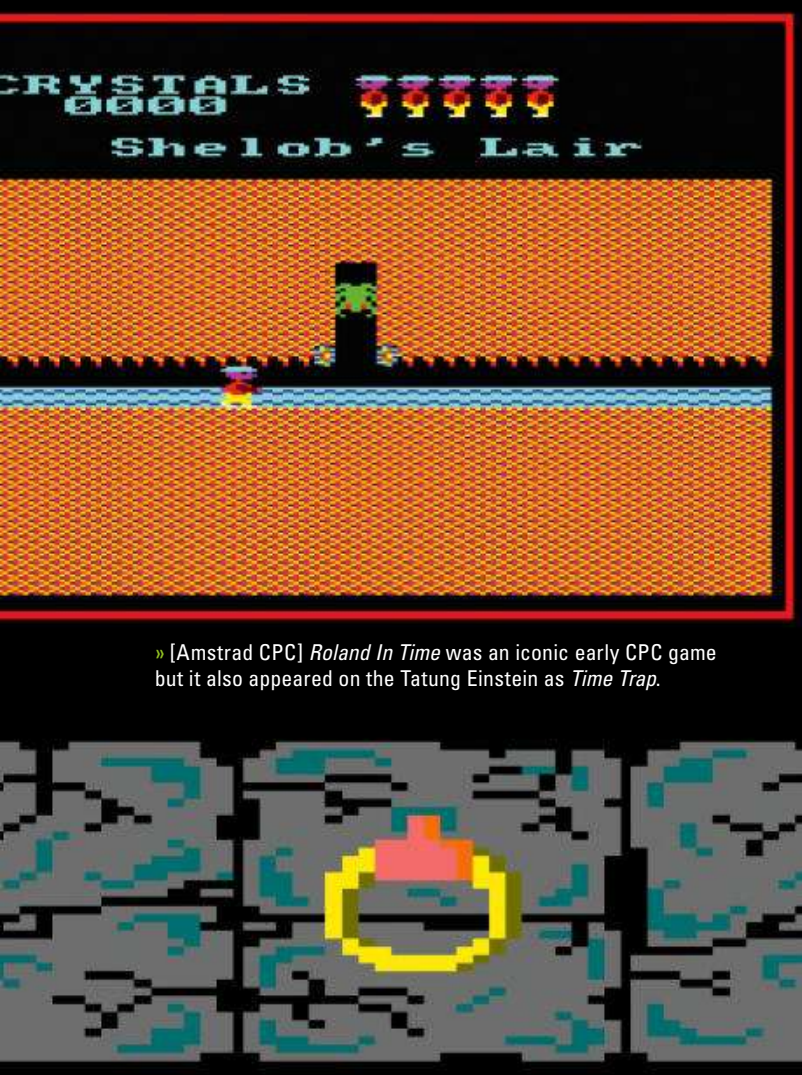
» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland In Space* made use of the Amstrad SSA-1 Speech Synthesiser, assuming you were lucky enough to own one.

Amsoft never gave Gem Software any brief. "I don't think there was any 'grand plan' for Roland – it was just a name to hang the title of a game on," John says. "We just had the ideas, ran them past Peter and, if he liked them, Amsoft would publish them. Otherwise Gem Software published them but that didn't happen often." So why did this publisher take Roland down on a sci-fi journey?

"I was, and still am, an avid science fiction and fantasy reader with a library of some 2,000 books on those genres so doubtless some of the plots from them were 'influential'," John says. Among those influences was *Doctor Who*: for, as well as travelling around in a red phone box, *Roland In Time* actually included the *Doctor Who* theme tune. A homage? "Basically game ideas just came out of my head," John continues. "I suppose that *Doctor Who* had some vague input into *Roland In Time*."

This game was written in Gem Software's offices in The Maltings in Sawbridgeworth. By this point, John had familiarised himself with the workings of the CPC by tinkering with a 464 on the sixth floor of the Amstrad building. It took about four months to develop *Roland In Time*, largely because it was spread over 53 screens, with players able to time travel to any level (or warp) they wished.

The aim was to collect crystals scattered around history and use them to fix a time machine so that Roland could come face to face with his nemesis, Maestro. Many CPC owners played this game as a pack-in title with their computers. They also got the chance to enjoy *Roland In Space* which proved a worthy



» [Amstrad CPC] *Roland In Time* was an iconic early CPC game but it also appeared on the Tatung Einstein as *Time Trap*.

sequel of sorts, too, providing more of the same albeit it with space travel replacing time travel: players could choose a planet and explore themed worlds.

"*Roland In Space* just built on *Roland In Time* and became a sequel, with a few extras thrown in," John says. For both, much effort was also made to optimise the games, in line with most of the titles Gem Software produced. "I used to shave microseconds off game engine loops and only used the 'operating system' to load my code which then took over the machine completely. A couple of the games we made used the voice synthesiser that Amstrad brought out and each game learned from the ones before it: sometimes it would take months of putting an idea on a back burner before it came to anything."

By the end of 1985, however, the *Roland* series came to an end, leaving gamers with eight commercially-released titles. "I think the *Roland* thing had simply run its course," John says. Developers were preferring to put out games under their own names and Amsoft itself became a less prolific publisher, only releasing eight more titles between 1986 and 1989.

Yet the Roland character had done 'his' job. He'd provided some exclusive games (even if some were in name only), and he'd helped Amstrad towards an initial 50-strong catalogue. Sure, he's unlikely to be remembered in the same breath as those other gaming mascots but could the series nevertheless have been seen as a pioneering given how few other recognisable characters there were back then? "Well, I've become more nostalgic about these things 30 years later but, pioneering? It didn't feel like that at the time," Roland laughs.

BUILDING AMSOFT'S CATALOGUE

AMSTRAD DESPERATELY NEEDED GAMES AND HELPED OUT DEVELOPERS

Before Amstrad launched the CPC 464, it knew the computer would live or die on the strength of its software catalogue. To build a catalogue of 50 titles, its software division Amsoft asked for 50 prototypes to be created and sent to developers.

"We were tasked with making 50 hand-built pre-production prototypes which were distributed to people writing software," recalls Roland Perry, who had just three months getting from concept to first working prototype. "Eventually, with a bit of cannibalism, we probably shipped 46 or 47 of them."

Grey in colour, these machines didn't carry the CPC branding. A label stated it was an Amstrad 64k micro computer and the software developers were handed a freestanding 5V power supply and an Amstrad 14-inch colour television with the tuner disconnected and a socket on the back to turn it into a clone of an Acorn monitor.

"Outside, it was indistinguishable from what became the 464 other than the inclusion of the 5V power and Acorn-compatible video connector," Roland says. "The motherboard was also 99% the same as the final production units." The prototypes came with a technical manual. "It was 500 pages and virtually unheard of at the time," Roland continues.

Gill Lambert, Amstrad's marketing services executive, was given the job of distributing both the machines and the firmware manuals. "I got to drive Roland's Astra GTE," she tells us. But what's this? Indescomp founder José Luis Domínguez has gone on record describing his CPC prototype as "hellish-looking" – a computer prone to overheating with a basic screen and lots of cables protruding from it. It doesn't sound like one of the grey prototypes Roland describes and even Roland is perplexed.

» "There's something for everyone," says the advert. "From *Roland-on-the-Ropes* to Easi-Amsword word processing. That's one good reason for making Amstrad's CPC 464 your new home computer?"

What's more, former *Amstrad Computer User* editor Simon Rockman, who still possesses one of the grey prototypes to which Roland refers, tells us, "I know what José Luis is talking about and it's a lot earlier than the one I have." As such, it's proving to be a bit of a mystery. All we know for certain was that *Roland In The Caves* and *Roland On The Ropes* were developed on a prototype given to Indescomp.

There's also confusion over which prototype was used to write *Roland In Time* and *Roland In Space*. Gem Software's John Line recalls developing them on a CPC 664 prototype. "It was a 'hacked about'" 464 case with the three-inch disc drive replacing the tape drive, a bit like what José Luis describes. "The screen seemed like a production one; it was just the computer's case which was a bit Heath Robinson."

Roland says he's unsure there was a 664 prototype, however. "Perhaps this is a 464 plus a pre-production DDI-1 which of course would have had an advantage over the 664 of being able to develop the software on the floppy and save it to tape."

» A prototype model of the Amstrad CPC 464 contained in a distinctive grey case. Credit: CPCLER, cpcwiki.eu.

Atari 7800

» **MANUFACTURER:** Atari » **YEAR:** 1984
» **COST:** £69.95 (launch), £50+ (today, boxed), £45+ (today, unboxed)

Having realised that the Atari 5200 was not going to be the success it had hoped for, Atari quickly moved to create a new console that would address the shortcomings of its predecessor, with General Computer Corporation contracted to do the engineering. The Atari 7800 would offer beefed up graphical capabilities, a less awkward controller and backwards compatibility with Atari 2600 games out of the box. The 7800 is visually similar to its older sibling, with the sloping shape, black plastic casing and silver central strip with rainbow colouring all reminiscent of the 5200. However, the 7800 differentiates itself with on-board buttons and less prominent ventilation grilles, as well as a smaller overall size and more rounded edges.

Though initially announced and test marketed in 1984, a full launch for the system would not take place until 1986, putting the system in much closer proximity to the arrival of Japanese rivals by Nintendo and Sega. The NES would go on to dominate the entire console business, vastly outselling Atari's machine, and the Master System also proved to be more popular. The 7800 would ultimately be discontinued along with the 2600 in 1992, with just 59 games having been officially released for the system. ★

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Atari 7800 fact

■ Though the Atari 7800's sound capabilities were weak due to the reuse of the TIA chip, *Ballblazer* and *Commando* cartridges incorporate a POKEY chip for improved sound.

PROCESSORS: ATARI SALLY 6502 8-BIT CPU (3.58 MHZ OR 7.16 MHZ)

RAM: 4KB MAIN MEMORY

GRAPHICS: ATARI MARIA CUSTOM CHIP, UP TO 320X240 DISPLAY (160X240 TYPICAL), 256 COLOUR PALETTE, UP TO 30 SPRITES PER SCANLINE

AUDIO: ATARI TIA, TWO CHANNELS

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 48KB)

BIOS: 4KB BIOS ROM

ESSENTIAL GAME
Food Fight

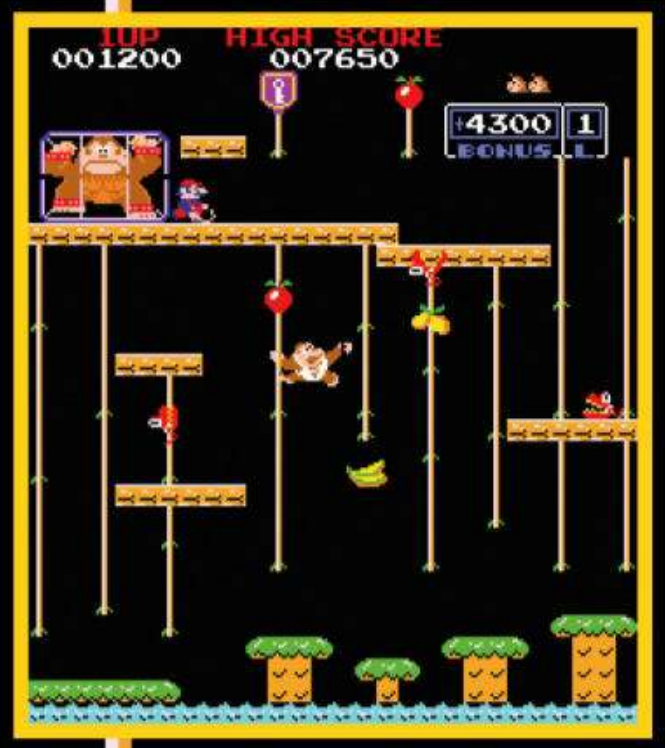
This arcade conversion is not the biggest name ever, but it's a real favourite on the 7800. Your goal is to get from one end of the stage to the ice cream on the opposite side, while avoiding a group of hostile chefs who are trying to pelt you with food. Luckily, you can grab some of your own as pies, bananas, watermelons and more are strewn liberally around each stage, giving you a great opportunity to take out your adversaries en route to your sweet treat. It's not complex, but it's a great example of the classic arcade fun the system offers.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

DONKEY KONG JR.

AS DONKEY KONG CELEBRATES ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY, WE GO APE OVER THE CHARMING ARCADE SEQUEL THAT PIT DK'S CUTE LITTLE OFFSPRING JUNIOR AGAINST SOME LOSER CALLED MARIO. WONDER WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT GUY?

WORDS BY
MARTYN CARROLL



» [Arcade] So close! Junior's short arms means he'll need to slide down and take the long way round.

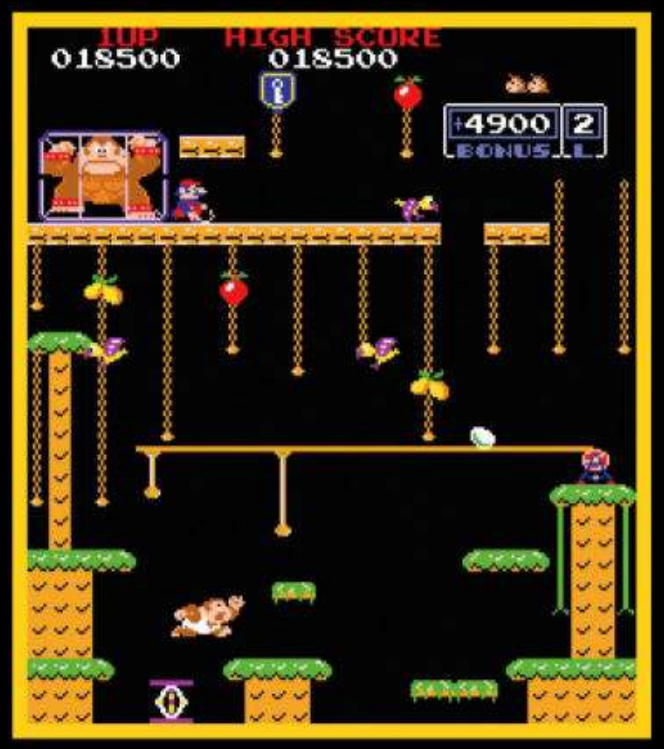
» [Arcade] In the brilliant final stage, Junior has to guide the six keys up the chains to free DK.

Even if you're not a massive Nintendo fan, there are three things you'll know about *Donkey Kong Jr.* It was the game where Mario first got his name, having been known as Jumpman in *Donkey Kong*. It was also the only game where Mario played the baddie, with the roles reversed compared to the original. Thirdly, it was the game where DK's son Junior made his videogame debut.

If you are a massive Nintendo fan, you'll know that none of these things are strictly true. They're Donkey *Wrong*. Mario was known as Mario in various home versions of the original *Donkey Kong* before *Donkey Kong Jr* debuted in Japanese arcades in August 1982. Mario was also the antagonist in *Donkey Kong Circus*, a Game & Watch game released in 1984. Here, DK is forced to juggle pineapples while balancing on a barrel, and if he fails, ringmaster Mario laughs and points at him. Finally, Junior first appeared in *Donkey Kong* for the Game & Watch as the cheeky monkey who rings the alarm bell. In the manual he's called Mini Donkey Kong, but it's clearly Junior depicted in the game. Yet none of this really matters, because behind all the trivia and lore lies a fantastic follow-up that proved that *Donkey Kong* was no one-hit wonder. Creators Shigeru Miyamoto and Gunpei Yokoi could have taken the easy route and simply devised some new stages and obstacles for Mario to overcome. Instead they flipped the formula and had Junior trying to rescue his 'Papa' from his wicked captor Mario.

Whereas Mario was quite the jumper, Junior's talent was climbing and each of the game's four stages featured vines, chains and poles to traverse. The climbing mechanic was integral to the gameplay: Junior could climb one vine slowly, but by grabbing an adjacent vine he could scamper upwards like a spider monkey. It was the opposite when descending: one vine quick, two vines slow. Junior was unarmed against Mario's jungle critters (although he could dislodge fruit which would drop and wipe out enemies below), so learning how to climb effectively was essential. The climbing came into its own on the final stage where Junior had to push six keys up chains to finally free his dad. This was the first stage with no defined route to victory, so you could freestyle your way around the screen – climbing, sliding and swinging.

It was the sort of brilliant stage that Nintendo could have spun an entirely separate game out of… and in 1983 it attempted to do just that. Unfortunately the result was *Donkey Kong Jr Math*, an educational spin-off for the Famicom/NES that absolutely nobody asked for. It's a good job that Nintendo's home console had already received an excellent conversion of the coin-op. Elsewhere, Coleco developed versions for the ColecoVision, Intellivision and Atari 2600 consoles,



» [Arcade] If you can time your jump right (not easy), the springboard provides a handy shortcut.

"They flipped the formula and had Junior trying to rescue his 'Papa' from his wicked captor Mario"

SPRINGBOARD

BONUS FRUIT

SNAPJAWS

THE RAREST OF KONGS

WOULD YOU ADAM AND EVE IT?

The ColecoVision versions of both *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr* were missing a stage and the intermissions between stages due to a lack of cartridge space. Coleco later addressed this by producing 'complete' versions on cassette for its Adam computer. Yet for *Donkey Kong Jr* it went a step further by adding a brand new fifth stage set in Mario's kitchen. Here, Junior has to dodge plungers and navigate an industrial-sized mixing bowl while Mario flings flaming hot pies at him.

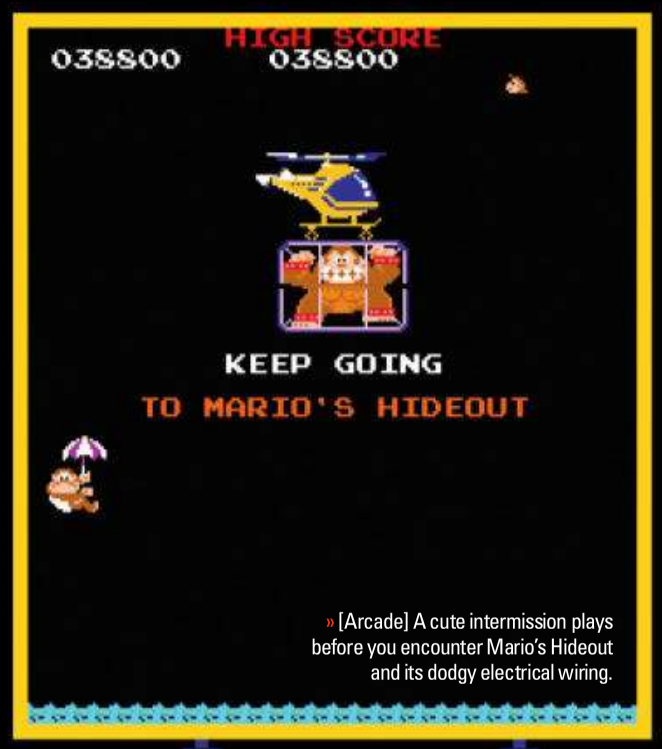
It's a neat addition, but the story goes that Nintendo didn't want Coleco adding enhancements (presumably as it would give it an edge over Nintendo's own versions). The fifth stage was therefore nixed, but it has since surfaced in leaked prototype builds and it can now be emulated. Some enterprising individuals have also reproduced the five stage version in cart form and unofficially released it as *Super Donkey Kong Junior.*

» [Arcade] If you're aiming for a high score, you can grind lots of points by jumping sparks in Mario's Hideout.

▶ while Atari converted it to its 8-bit computer range. Atari also commissioned versions for other computers under the Atarisoft label but these never saw the light of day (the BBC Micro version has since surfaced). Versions were later released for the Coleco Adam, Atari 7800 and, most recently in 2018, Nintendo Switch.

It's quite amusing to witness Mario's appearance in some of the early home versions. In the arcade game he looks the same as he did in the original, only now he's holding what looks like an animal tamer's whip. Yet Nintendo was clearly not vetting his appearance elsewhere at this point, resulting in a decidedly non-standard wardrobe for the future gaming icon. Of note is the ColecoVision version where he's donning a double-peaked cap which makes him look like a chubby little demon.

As this was the wild west days of videogame licensing, a bunch of unofficial clones were also available for home computers. They included Superior's *Zany Kong Junior* (aka *Killer Gorilla 2*) for the BBC Micro, *Junior's Revenge* from Computerware for the Tandy CoCo, and, oddly, Ocean's Hunchback II for the Commodore 64. Ocean had already released a *Donkey Kong* clone simply called *Kong* and followed this up with *Kong Strikes Back*, which was actually a clone of *Mr Do's Wild Ride*. Yet its sequel to *Hunchback* was clearly modelled on *Donkey Kong Jr*, right down to the final stage where you had to push the clappers up the ropes to the bells.



» [Arcade] A cute intermission plays before you encounter Mario's Hideout and its dodgy electrical wiring.

Following the success of the *Donkey Kong* Game & Watch device, the sequel was also reworked for the handheld range. In fact, there were three separate reworkings. The first, *Donkey Kong Jr*, was a New Wide Screen release that combined elements from the first two stages of the arcade game. The other two stages – Mario's Hideout and the final rescue – were adapted for the confusingly-titled *Donkey Kong II*, which was a Multi Screen device. A different *Donkey Kong Jr* game was later released as both a TableTop and Panorama model. This one featured colour visuals and gave Junior a brand new challenge that involved using umbrellas and balloons to cross ▶

» [Arcade] Endgame! Junior rescues DK and Mario gives chase – only to be booted away by a giant simian foot.

» [Arcade] On later playthroughs, Mario is able to summon more Snapjaws to make Junior's job even more difficult.

"Junior's post-arcade gaming career can be summed up as a series of cameos and walk-on parts"

BONUS FRUIT

KONG KEYS

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH OF THE HOME VERSIONS WEREN'T MONKEYING ABOUT?

ATARI 2600

■ It may look beyond basic, and sound absolutely awful, but this bare-bones version plays OK. Three of the four stages are included (the 'springboard' stage didn't make the cut), yet the most unfortunate omission is the complete lack of fruit for bombing enemies with.

INTELLIVISION

■ A small step up from the 2600 version, benefitting from better defined sprites and a closer resemblance to the coin-op machine. The sound is… well, it sounds like a group of clowns randomly honking their horns. Three stages are included, with Mario's Hideout sadly missing.

COLECOVISION

■ As with the Intellivision release, Mario's Hideout is AWOL. But otherwise this is a very good version which captures the key elements of the coin-op. An enhanced version that includes Mario's Hideout was later released for the Coleco Adam (see The Rarest Of Kongs boxout).

ATARI 8-BIT

■ All four stages are present and largely correct – proving you can overlook the slightly off palette used throughout and the choppy movement of the enemies (which doesn't do any favours for the hit detection). It's nice and speedy though and presents a decent challenge.

NES

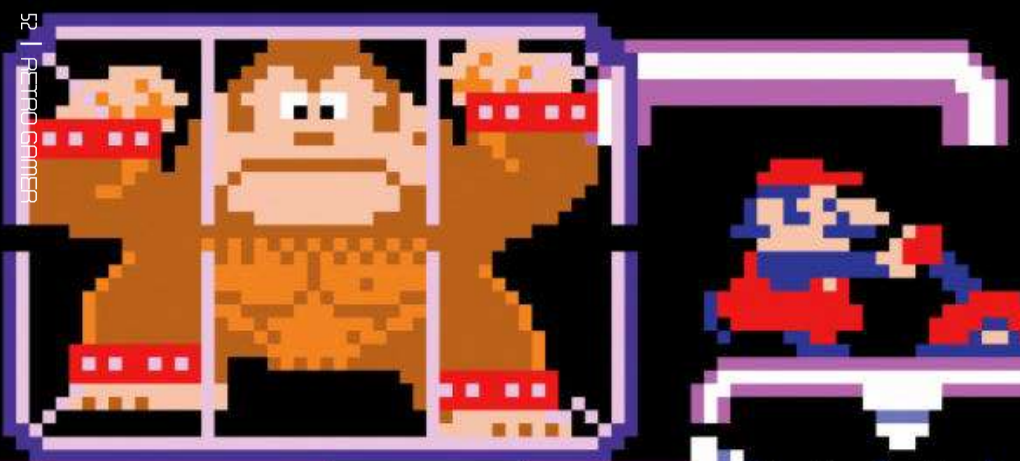
■ Nintendo unsurprisingly produced the standout home version for its own console. All of the stages are here (not a given, seeing as one stage was missing from NES *Donkey Kong*), and it's faithful to the coin-op. This later appeared as a Nintendo Virtual Console release.

ATARI 7800

■ A cut above the other Atari home versions, but with this arriving in 1988, you'd hope it would be. It doesn't look or sound as good as the NES version but it's just as playable, and includes the full set of stages. Another decent coin-op conversion for the 7800 console.

BBC MICRO

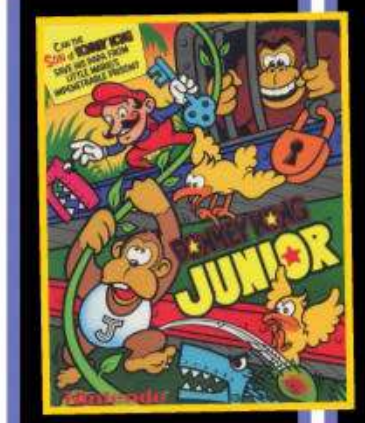
■ Atari assigned porting duties to Adrian Stephens (having seen *Killer Gorilla*, his unofficial Beeb clone of *Donkey Kong*). Sadly it was never released at the time, which is a shame as it's a great little version that, brash colours aside, captures the look and feel of the coin-op.



"Both 'Kings of Kong' Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe have held the high score record in the past"

» The three *Donkey Kong* cabs look lovely together, as seen here in super-fan Chris Ellison's coin-op collection.

SPARKS



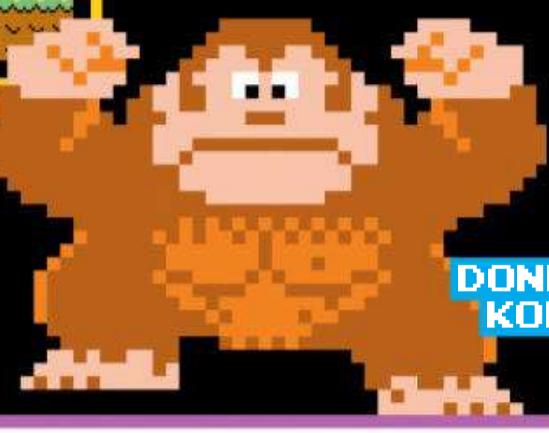
▶ a jungle pond to reach Papa. The first two adaptations appeared on *Game & Watch Gallery 3* for the Game Boy Color. Junior would also pop up in several of the 'modern' updates of Game & Watch games featured in the *Gallery* series.

Sadly Junior's post-arcade gaming career can be summed up as a series of cameos and walk-on parts. His biggest claim to fame is being one of the eight original racers in *Super Mario Kart* (1992), but he was replaced by his dad in the sequels. Later on the role of young Donkey Kong was claimed by Diddy Kong following his debut in Rare's *Donkey Kong Country*. It's believed that the current incarnation of Donkey Kong could be a grown-up Junior, or maybe Junior's son, or perhaps neither. Again, it doesn't really matter.

The game itself has flirted with 'classic' status over the years and remains popular, particularly in the competitive play arena. It's overshadowed by *Donkey Kong* in this regard of course, but both 'Kings of Kong' Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe have held the high score record in the past. Like the original, the game suffers from a 'kill screen', so it involves amassing as many points as possible before you can no longer progress. The current champion is Mark Kiehl of Oklahoma, USA, whose high score of 1,412,200 has stood since May 2013. Kiehl theorises that it's possible to earn an extra 60,000 points, so there's a chance someone may steal his crown in the future. To apply, challengers just need a spare three and a half hours and an outrageous talent for vine swinging and point pressing. ✱

» [NES] *Donkey Kong Jr* and its predecessor launched alongside the Japanese Famicom in 1983.

» [GBA] The original Game & Watch game was faithfully replicated on the *Game & Watch Gallery Advance* collection.



DONKEY KONG

SPARKS

DEVELOPER Q&A

HARLEY PUTHUFF JR WAS TASKED WITH PORTING THE GAME TO THE ATARI 2600

How did you land the *Donkey Kong Jr* job?
I was hired by Steve Kitchen of Woodside Design Associates because of my experience with the Z80 processor. Steve's brother Garry had developed the 2600 version of *Donkey Kong* and we were under contract to develop several other games for Coleco. *Donkey Kong Jr* was my first project, and in fact my first game ever. We used Apple IIs for programming with a special card that simulated a game cartridge through a ribbon cable to the 2600. In the final stages we blasted EPROMs and plugged them into cartridges for testing.

Were you already familiar with the arcade game?
Actually, no. I was not a real gamer. Coleco provided us with the arcade game for the conversion and I actually spent an entire week doing nothing but playing the arcade game for familiarisation.

Programming the 2600 seems to be a dark art. What were the biggest challenges?
'Dark ages' would be more apt. The 2600 was extremely primitive. It had 128 bytes of dynamic RAM and that was all the working storage available! Everything worked at 1MHz and had to be synchronised with the raster beam on the TV screen. The idea was to stay ahead of the video signal so that you could alter it just before a raster line was generated.

One of the four screens is missing from your version. Did you build this screen but have to cut it due to lack of cartridge space?
No, what was in the final cartridge was the result of cramming in everything that could be included. I'm sure that we eliminated that fourth screen early on.

Did you receive any assistance, or interference, from Nintendo?
No, none at all, and we didn't get much beyond the hardware from Coleco either. We did have a business relationship with the guys at Activision and could seek technical advice from them. The best resource was Garry Kitchen who was a great programmer and electronics whiz.

How were you rewarded for your work?
Being my first foray into the games world, I didn't have a royalty deal. I was paid a simple salary, albeit a good one at the time.

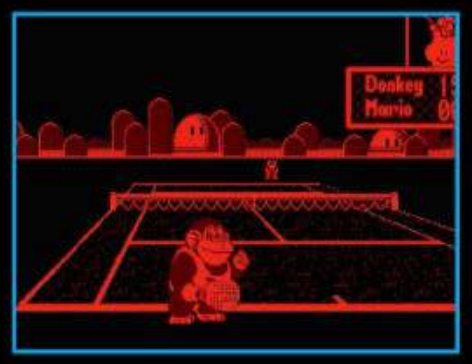
Were you happy with the finished game?
I don't think any programmer is ever completely satisfied with the final version, particularly when working in such a limited environment. But, it was the best that could be done at the time. I was happier with my next project, *Time Pilot*, as I'd been through the 'basic training' and was more adept at maximising the environment by then.

"I actually spent an entire week doing nothing but playing the arcade game"

KAMEO KONG THE BEST OF JUNIOR'S BIT PARTS

SUPER MARIO KART
YEAR: 1992
FORMAT: SNES
Lining up on the starting grid against seven rivals, Junior is a heavyweight racer alongside Bowser. His special items are bananas, naturally. Junior would not feature in another *Mario Kart* game until has was added to the tacky *Mario Kart Tour* in 2020.

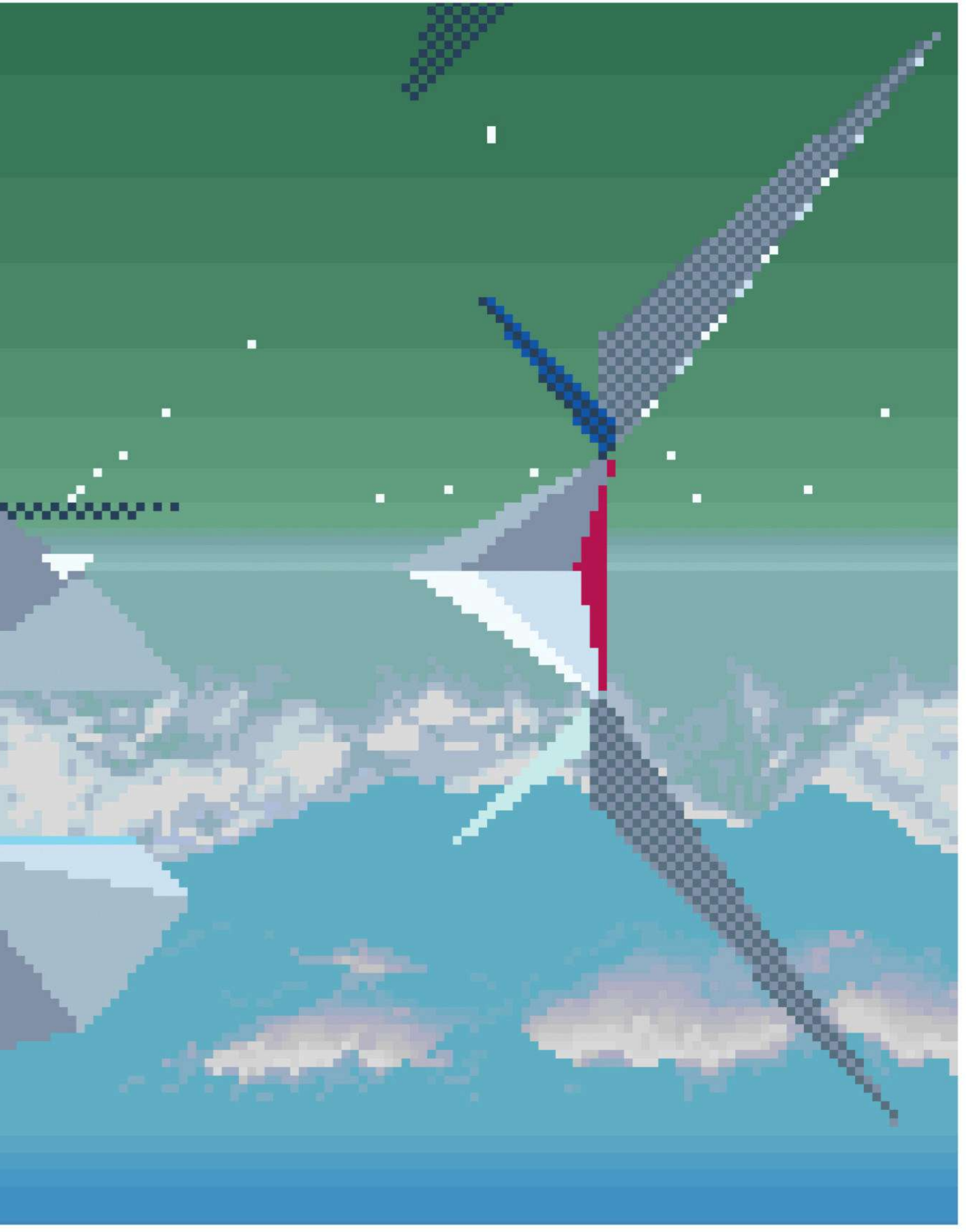
DONKEY KONG
YEAR: 1994
FORMAT: GAME BOY
The game that brilliantly revived DK also brought along Junior, who tries to thwart Mario by throwing levers and generally being a pest. Of note is the jungle-set fourth stage which is based on *Donkey Kong Jr* and features vines, Snapjaws and Nitpickers.



MARIO'S TENNIS
YEAR: 1995
FORMAT: VIRTUAL BOY
Junior pulls on his tennis sneakers and competes against the usual crew in one of the better games to appear on Nintendo's 3D misfire. He would return as an unlockable character in *Mario Tennis* for the N64 where he teams up with his dad in doubles.

GAME & WATCH GALLERY 3
YEAR: 1999
FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR
Junior pops up in all four *G&W Gallery* titles, but it's the third entry that features both the original G&W game and an updated 'modern' version (pictured) that's set over three screens. A further enhanced version appears on *G&W Gallery Advance*.

WARIOWARE TWISTED!
YEAR: 2002
FORMAT: GAME BOY ADVANCE
Donkey Kong Jr was featured as one of 9-Volt's NES tributes, where a rather oversized Junior has to quickly shove the keys up the chains to free DK. This is done by tilting the GBA to make him climb. On later levels you also have to avoid flying Nitpickers.



Star Fox

SUPER PRICEY POLYGONS

» SNES » 1993 » NINTENDO EAD/ARGONAUT SOFTWARE

I paid £90 for my Japanese copy of *Star Fox*, which is about £184 in today's money. That's a silly amount of cash to spend on a videogame, but you tend to do silly things when you're 19.

I remember the amount because a PAL Super Nintendo with *Super Mario World* cost around £120 and a friend mentioned I was crazy spending that much money on a single game when I could just buy a console as well. I've since been foolish enough to spend more money than that on a single videogame (collecting retro games is expensive) but at the time it was the most money I'd ever spent on a single game.

Star Fox's quality was obvious as soon as the first screenshots started filtering across the games magazines of the time. Polygon graphics were still in their infancy, but it was exciting to see the new gameplay mechanics that were emerging during this period and Nintendo's game made me think of *Starglider* on the Atari ST. It also reminded me of Namco's *Starblade*, a game I absolutely loved playing in my local arcade and the numerous screenshots I'd seen promised a similar arcade-like experience.

It took a couple of weeks of saving but I placed my order at the Video Games Centre and took the long bus ride to Winton to pick it up. It was a good hour-long trip, but my goodness was it worth the journey. Today *Star Fox* can feel a little quaint and certainly a little sluggish due to its low frame rate, but it remains a satisfying blaster and a good highlight of the Super FX chip. Back in 1993 it felt like the greatest game I'd ever played and I couldn't get enough of it. The graphics looked sensational and beyond anything I'd ever seen running on any other home systems at the time. The bosses were just as mesmerising, particularly the first boss (shown here) which zooms overhead and immediately impresses due to its sheer size and scale, before throwing smaller ships and concentrated laser fire at you.

While I no longer own my original copy, I did pick up a US copy of the game a couple of years ago. The cartridge doesn't look anywhere near as nice, but the cost of £5 was a lot easier on the wallet.

THE MAKING OF BALANCE OF

THIS INTRIGUING SIMULATION OF COLD WAR POLITICS BANKROLLED THE EARLY SUCCESS OF MINDSCAPE AND BOOSTED THE REPUTATION OF ATARI ALUMNI CHRIS CRAWFORD TO NEW HEIGHTS. BUT A DISASTROUS PUBLISHING DEAL ALMOST MEANT IT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS CRAWFORD
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **PLATFORM:** MACINTOSH
- **GENRE:** STRATEGY

Balance Of Power garnered both huge critical acclaim and massive financial success on its release in 1985. In the early Eighties, videogames for the most part were perceived by the public as little more than arcade frivolities, but *Balance Of Power* was different. It offered a daunting glimpse of the complexities of the ongoing Cold War and the delicate statecraft that just about stopped the world descending into nuclear annihilation – which was a very real possibility at the time.

Even today, the game is still highly regarded. "*Balance Of Power* is one of the most consistently requested titles in the archive, year over year," says Ken McAllister of the Learning Games Initiative Research Archive (LGIRA) in Arizona. "We almost always feature it in game history exhibits we help curate. In many ways, it's one of the first 'serious games.'" And it all came about thanks to the implosion of a certain company called Atari.

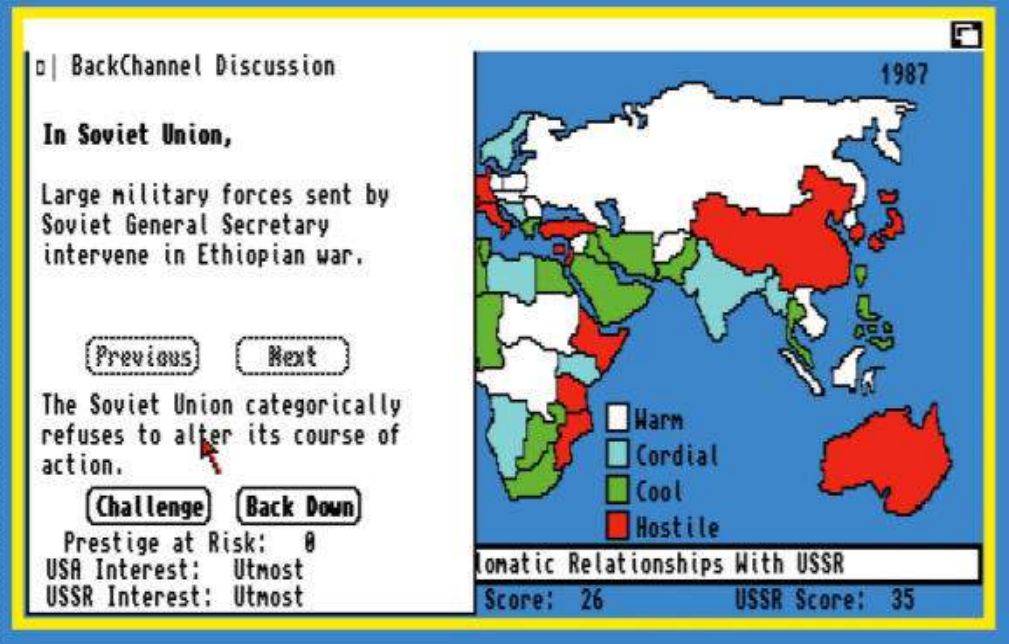
Chris Crawford had made several landmark games for the Atari 800 home computer, including the well-received wargame *Eastern Front (1941)*. But in early 1984 he suddenly found himself out of a job. The American videogame crash of 1983 resulted in massive layoffs at Atari, and Chris was let go in March 1984 with what he calls a "pretty sizeable" redundancy package.

He was soon approached with an offer from Amiga, "They wanted me to be their software evangelist," he says. Chris had previously been dubbed an evangelist by a reporter after giving a series of lively presentations for developers on how the Atari 800 worked and what it could do. "I'm a very good public speaker," he says, "and I really got out there and sold product." (Chris would go on to found the Computer Game Developers Conference in 1988, later shortened to GDC, and he gave the memorable 'Dragon Speech' there in 1992, at the end of which he ran from the hall while brandishing a sword.)

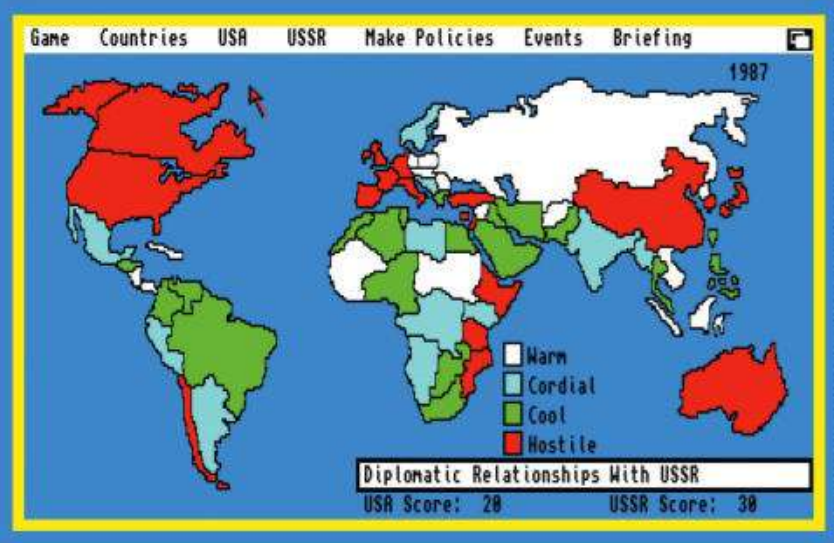
But then Chris surprisingly turned down the Amiga offer. "I decided that the Amiga had no future," he says, "so I went with the Mac. I considered it to be a no-brainer, the Macintosh is the future. And I was right."

The Apple Macintosh had been released in January 1984, and Chris was immediately attracted to the Mac's power and potential, with

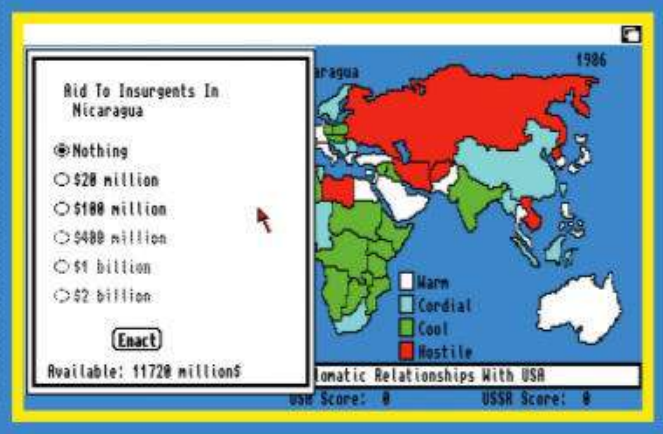
» Chris Crawford spent several years at Atari designing games for its 8-bit computers, before being laid off in 1984. As a freelancer he created *Balance Of Power* for the Macintosh in 1985, followed by several more games. He withdrew from commercial game development in 1992 to concentrate on interactive storytelling.



» [Amiga 500] Querying a rival power about their actions begins as a secret discussion, with no prestige at risk. But if you make a stand, it will become a public diplomatic crisis, with prestige points at risk.



» [Amiga 500] The world map can be changed to different configurations to show things like the superpowers' spheres of influence and the prestige ratings of each country.



» [Amiga 500] Aiding insurgents is the way to overthrow hostile governments and replace them with ones friendly to your cause. But you only have a limited amount of money to spend.

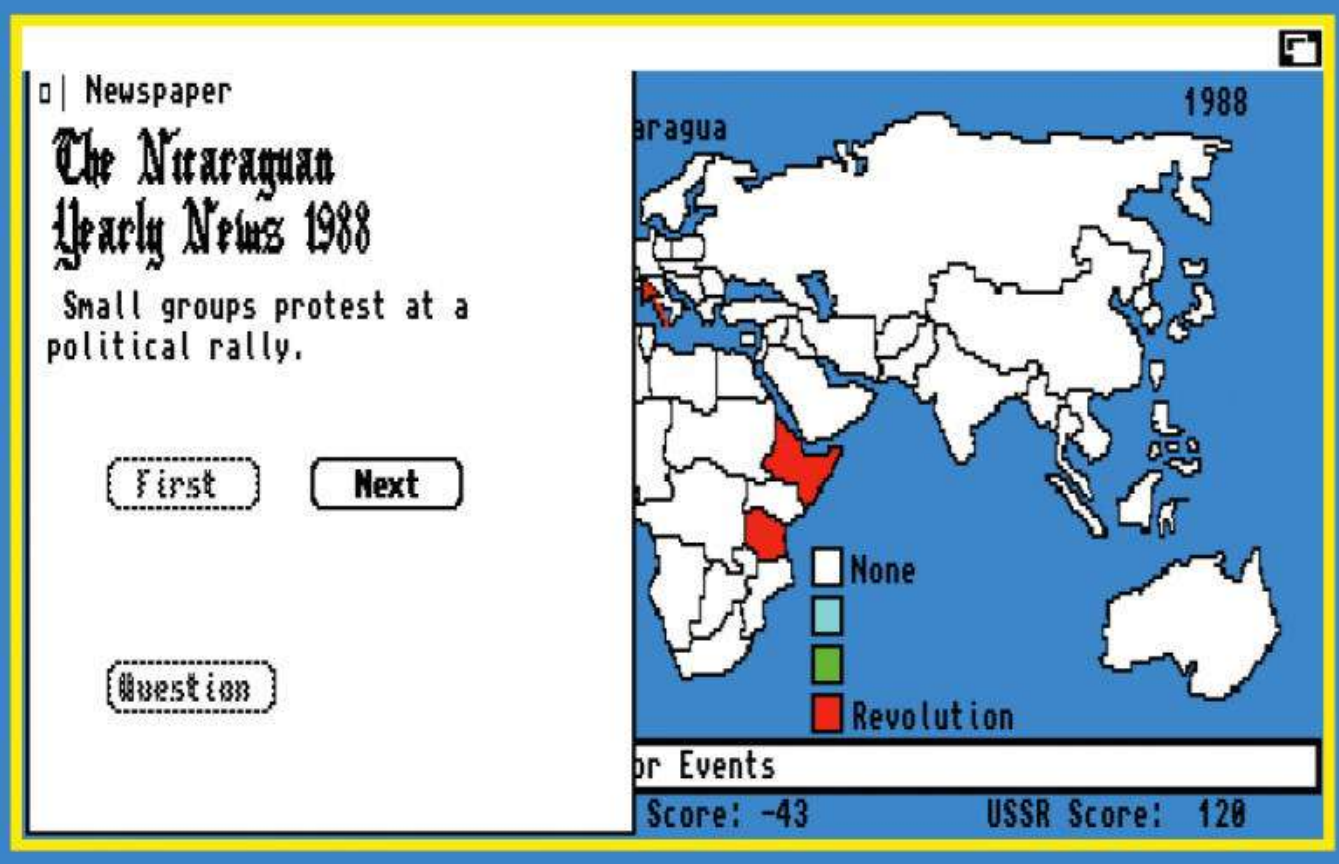
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TANKTICS
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1976

EASTERN FRONT (1941)
SYSTEM: ATARI 400, ATARI 800
YEAR: 1981

BALANCE OF THE PLANET (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MACINTOSH
YEAR: 1990

POWER



» [Amiga 500] The newspaper gives you an overview of events in the world and how your policies are affecting various nations.

its newfangled graphical user interface. The machine gave him an opportunity to pursue an idea that had been bubbling in his head for some time. "I had started off doing war games, but it always bothered me that war games were, well, they were militaristic," says Chris. "And I had long thought, would it be possible to do an 'un-war game'? Meanwhile, I had been studying geopolitical issues: what really got me going though were Henry Kissinger's books. Whatever one feels about the man's politics, his analysis of diplomacy and geopolitical interaction is really quite impressive. He had quite a few very penetrating observations because he was right there in the midst of it all."

Kissinger's books had provided some initial ideas, but it took the hefty specs of the Mac to bring *Balance Of Power* into reality. "This had been something I had been thinking about for years, but I knew that it wouldn't be appropriate or wouldn't work on the 8-bit computers," Chris says. "But the Macintosh came out, and I realised this machine has the heft to handle a program like this."

Funded by his Atari redundancy package, Chris began work on *Balance Of Power* – although he knew from the outset it would be a big commitment. "I discussed it all with my wife and said, 'You know, it may take me a year to build this thing, and I'm gonna have to spend a lot of money.' But she agreed, because

I had earned a lot of money from my games for the Atari. And so we made a huge investment, both in money and time."

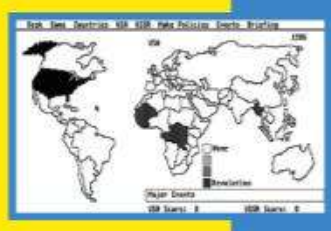
The first step was studying all of the geopolitical issues that would make up Chris' Cold War simulation. "I did an enormous amount of research," he says, "I bought a lot of books, examining these issues from all sorts of different directions." But when the time came to start programming, Chris found working with the Mac was a challenge, chiefly because it was so different from anything before it. "It was really hard to program for in the early days. I just had to throw away everything I knew and start all over," he says.

"Everything about the Mac was different: deep inside, it was very different. It was hard. Moreover, there was no development environment on the Mac itself. You couldn't

TIPPING THE BALANCE

A GUIDE TO THE DELICATE ART OF REALPOLITIK

POPULARITY CONTEST



■ The aim of *Balance Of Power* is to increase your superpower's prestige points without triggering a nuclear war. You do that by getting as many minor countries on your side as possible, either by helping them out or by replacing their governments with more sympathetic ones.

CHECK THE NEWS

■ Start your turn by checking the Events tab to see what's been going on. The newspaper gives an overview of current affairs, while the US Actions and USSR Actions tabs let you find out what that naughty opposing superpower has been up to.

QUESTION CAREFULLY

■ You can question your opponent's actions, but be careful. If they respond aggressively, you could trigger a diplomatic crisis. In that case, either you or your opponent backs down, losing prestige points in the process, or the crisis escalates. You should only start a crisis if you think your opponent will back down.

SUPPORT INSURGENTS

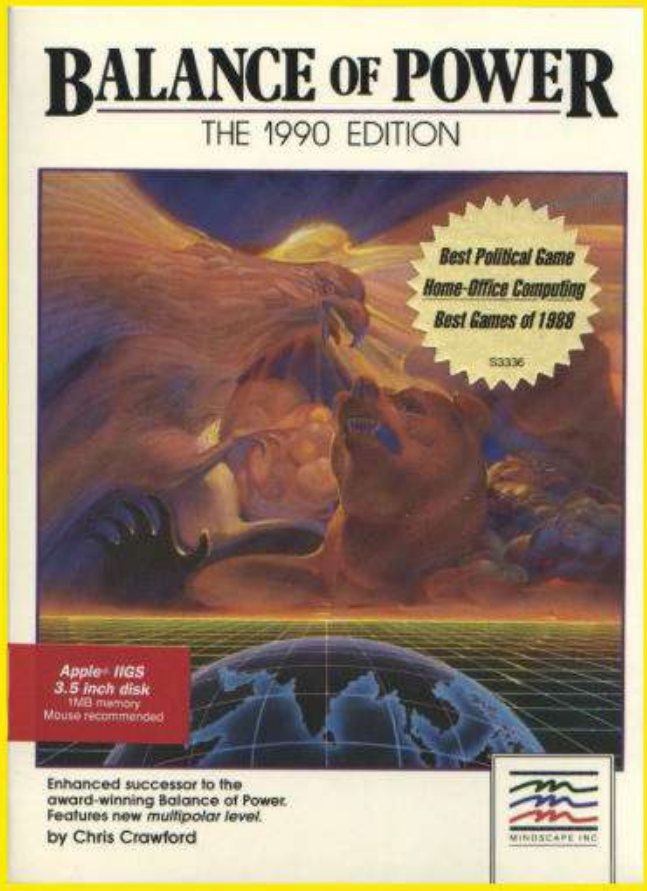
■ There are three types of insurgents: terrorists, guerrillas and rebels. If a country with an unfriendly government has an insurgency going on, you can support the insurgents with funding or even send your own troops to join them. But you can only send weapons to a country through contiguous allies.

PROTECT YOUR FRIENDS

■ You can win over allies by sending them economic aid, and if an insurgency begins in a friendly country, you can send weapons or troops to help your government. But be aware that some governments might not allow foreign troops to land on their soil.

GAME OVER

■ The game stops after ten years, at which point you'll get a score based on how many prestige points you've gained compared to your opposing superpower. But if at any point a diplomatic crisis escalates into a military crisis all the way up to DEFCON 1, then nuclear war begins and it's game over.



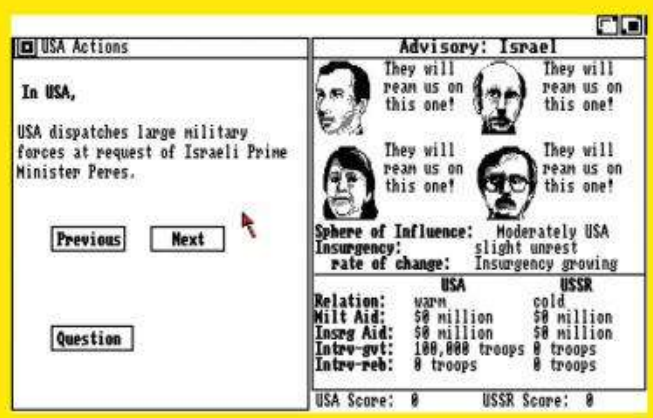
THE SORT-OF SEQUEL

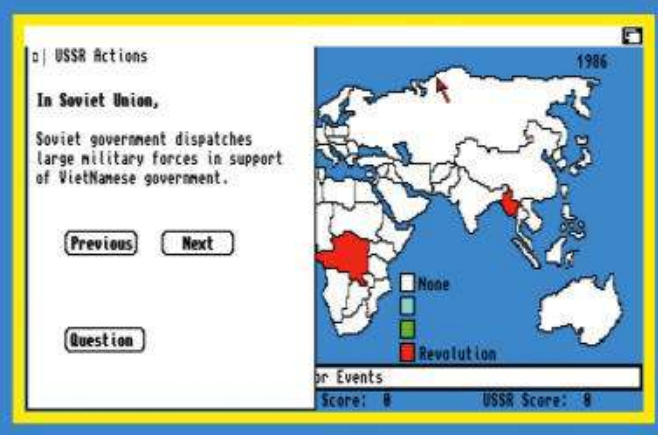
HOW BALANCE OF POWER: THE 1990 EDITION CAME ABOUT

Flush from the phenomenal success of the original *Balance Of Power*, Mindscape asked Chris Crawford to work on a follow-up. "I wasn't very enthusiastic about it," he says, "but basically, I cut a deal with them." Chris said he would work on a new edition if Mindscape agreed to publish another game that he had been thinking about making – what would become *Trust & Betrayal: The Legacy Of Siboot*.

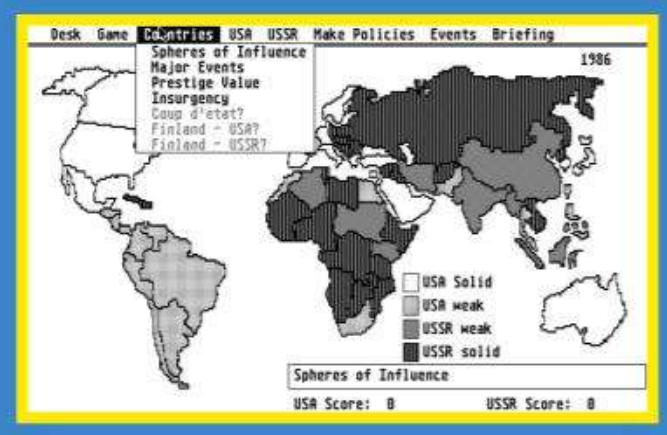
Balance Of Power: The 1990 Edition upped the number of countries from 60 to 80, and featured a team of advisers to help the players when they're making tactical decisions. It also allowed smaller countries to start wars among themselves, rather than simply act as puppets for the superpowers. "Basically, I took the original design and then just added a bunch of features," says Chris. "The gameplay just got messier. I didn't think much of it, because sequels are inherently boring. A sequel has to have the same basic architecture, and I had already optimised that architecture – it was a clean, complete architecture – and the sequel just piled stuff on top of it. All we did was make the game dirtier. So I wasn't too pleased with it, but they did sell a good number of copies.

"On the other hand, *Trust & Betrayal* was a commercial failure, but it is far and away the finest design I have ever done. It has a number of brilliant concepts in it, and it failed. But my attitude is that just shows how stupid the public is!"


USA Actions
In USA,
USA dispatches large military forces at request of Israeli Prime Minister Peres.
Previous
Next
Question
Advisory: Israel
They will ream us on this one!
They will ream us on this one!
They will ream us on this one!
They will ream us on this one!
Sphere of Influence: Moderately USA
Insurgency: slight unrest
rate of change: Insurgency growing
USA USSR
Relation: warm cold
Milt Aid: $0 million $0 million
Insrg Aid: $0 million $0 million
Intrv-gvt: 100,000 troops 0 troops
Intrv-reb: 0 troops 0 troops
USA Score: 0 USSR Score: 0



» [Amiga 500] You can only provide military aid to countries that are bordered by nations which are friendly to your superpower, which means it's hard to intervene in countries that are close to your rival.



» [Atari ST] The Atari ST version was very similar to the Macintosh original, especially when played on a monochrome high-definition monitor. But Chris Crawford didn't have a hand in any of the conversions.

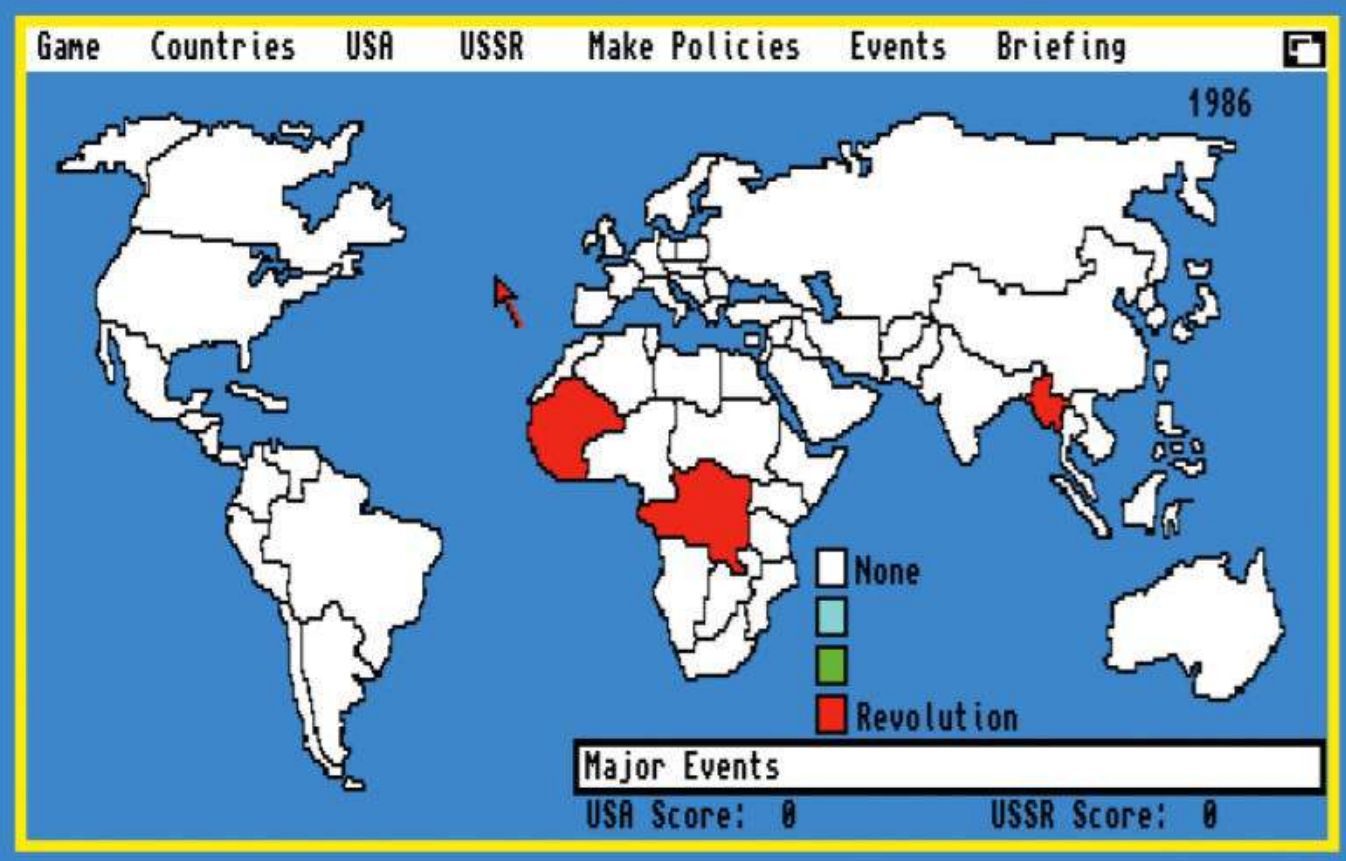
write programs for the Macintosh on the Macintosh. To do that, you needed a Lisa, which was Apple's previous computer. And I think the Lisa cost something like $5,000, and the Mac at the time cost $2,000." ($5,000 in 1984 is the equivalent of around $12,600 in 2021.)

"The thing that bothered me the most was you couldn't take over the machine," says Chris. "The 8-bit machines, you just took over, you wrote a program that just ran at base level. You did everything in assembler and ran it from there, and you had complete control of everything. With the Mac, you didn't get control of anything. There was this huge operating system between you and the Mac, and you had to go through the operating system to get anything done, and you had to do it the operating system's way." Despite the difficulties, Chris was committed. "I believed that this could be a really good game. I was very passionate about it," he says.

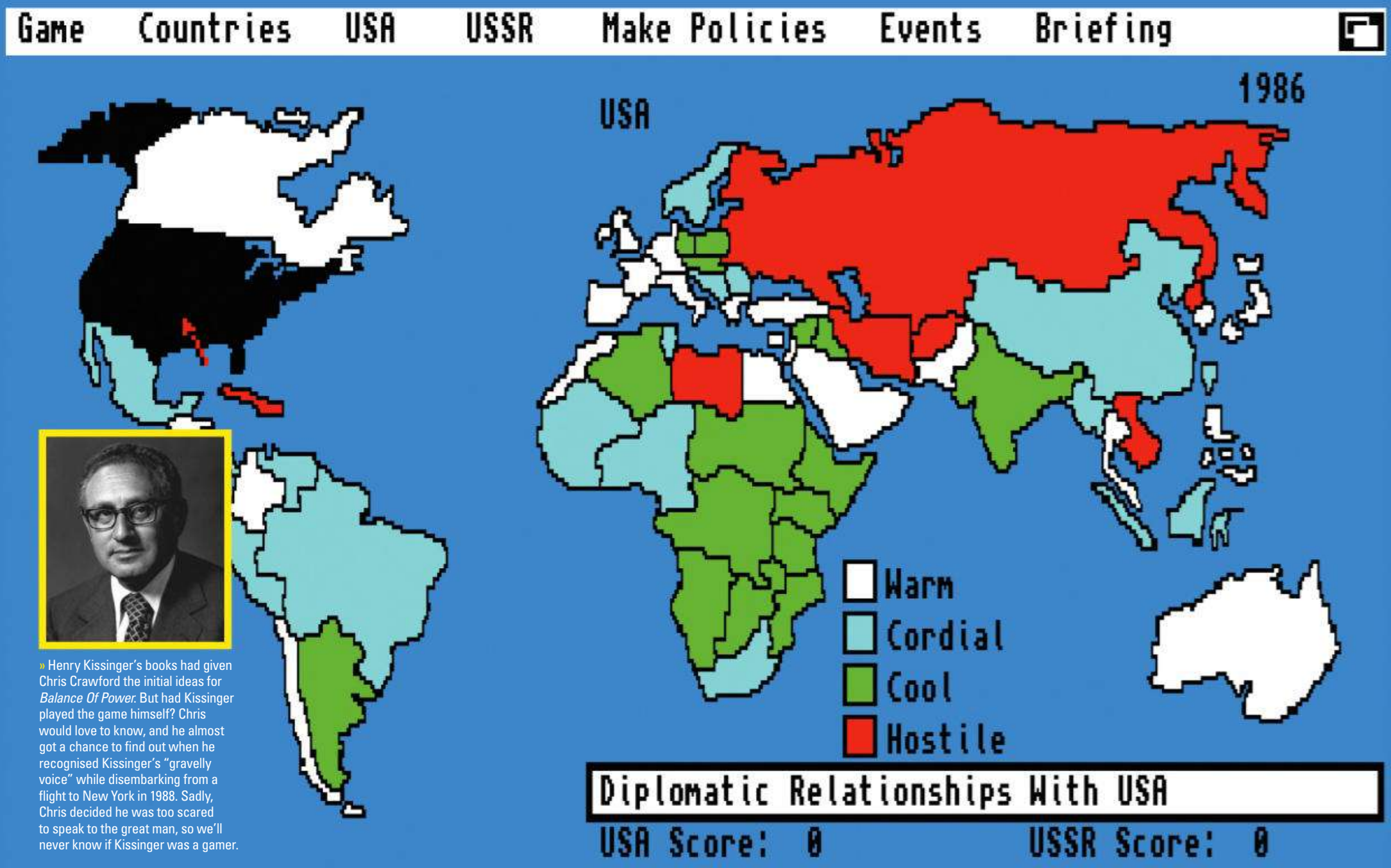
One of the problems he faced was creating a world map. "Nowadays, you'd just get a digital map," says Chris. "But back then we didn't have any of those options. So I bought a great big world map, and then I taped together all sorts of semi-transparent graph paper and traced the outlines of every country. Then I sat down with a tape recorder, tracing the boundary lines, and I would just say 'North, north, north, east, two north, west, west, one south.' And then I played it back, wrote down the stuff, and then typed it all in. It was two days' work – and it worked perfectly!"

Chris had a basic version of *Balance Of Power* running by around February 1985. "But it was a lousy game," he admits. "This is an important thing about game design in general: the game doesn't click until the very end. And all through development, it's crap. You're play testing and saying, 'God, this is horrible.' But you just keep working on it and polishing and trying to identify the problems."

At this point, Chris had a somewhat surprising company lined up to distribute the game – the book publisher Random House. "Everybody and his brother was pouring into the videogame field," explains Chris, "and I had an agent who approached Random House and cut a deal with them." But the publisher's inexperience with videogames quickly became apparent, Chris laments. "My initial interactions were with the vice president of the division that they were setting up to do software, and we had a lot of great talks. I explained what I was planning to do, and it all sounded wonderful. Then he assigned what we would now call a producer, whose job was to oversee the development. But in March it was still in pretty bad shape, and he hit the panic button. He didn't realise that with games, you just keep working and working until you get it to come



» [Amiga 500] The options screen warns that players who don't read the manual first are wasting their time – and *Balance Of Power* can certainly be intimidating at first. It was also one of the earliest games to feature a 'Nightmare' difficulty level.



» Henry Kissinger's books had given Chris Crawford the initial ideas for *Balance Of Power*. But had Kissinger played the game himself? Chris would love to know, and he almost got a chance to find out when he recognised Kissinger's "gravelly voice" while disembarking from a flight to New York in 1988. Sadly, Chris decided he was too scared to speak to the great man, so we'll never know if Kissinger was a gamer.

out right. But his feeling was 'It's March and your game is still crap.' So he proposed to fly out to California and spend a few days at my house, and get me back on track.

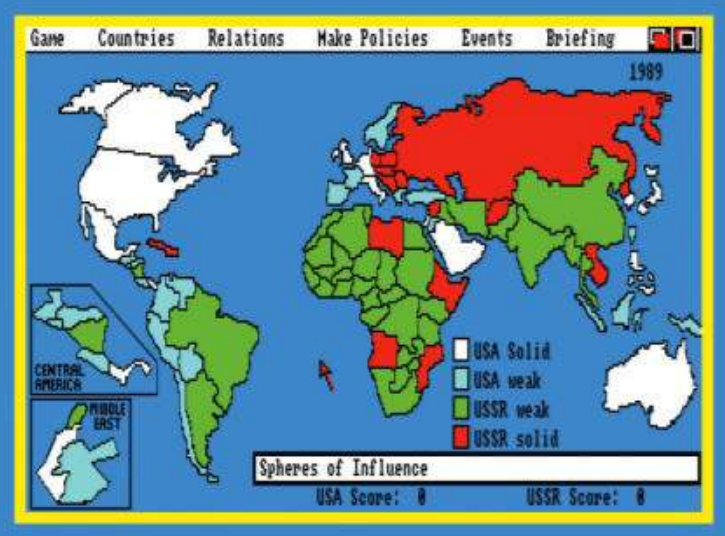
"Well, we spent a few days arguing, and on the last day I finally lost patience with him. And I said 'Look, Richard, you don't know anything about computer programming, you don't know anything about games, you don't know anything about geopolitics. Why are you trying to tell me how to design this game?' And he said 'Because I'm the guy in charge.' So he went back home and recommended to the boss that they cancel the contract, which they did."

At that point, things looked pretty grim, says Chris. "It was March of 1985. We were running out money: all the money we'd saved up was gone. And my wife said to me, 'Chris, maybe it's time for you to go out and get a real job. The games thing was fun, but that's over now.' And I said, 'Give me a few more months.' So I continued working on it, slowly improving it, and I called Jim Warren, who had founded the legendary West Coast Computer Faire."

Jim called a few people, and he got the interest of a reporter who decided to do a story on the game. "And that was read by some people in Chicago," says Chris, "who were just doing a start-up software company called Mindscape. They called me two days later and said 'We're interested in your game, why don't you fly out to Chicago and we'll talk about it?' So I flew out, and we got a contract." With fresh funding in place, Chris got to work on finishing the game – and the Mindscape deal had another unexpected benefit. "We were very, very lucky in that the CEO of Mindscape lived next door to a writer who often contributed to *The New York Times*, and he got interested in it," says Chris. "So he flew out to my place and we spent over two days in a long, long interview, then he wrote a very nice article about it that appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*. Boy, that really blasted off the sales."

Balance Of Power was a smash hit on its release in September 1985, and the game was soon converted to a wide range of systems, including the PC, Amiga, Atari ST, MSX and PC-88 – although Chris says he didn't have a hand in making any of the other versions. "We earned a total of about $450,000 in royalties," he recalls. "I think that was on sales of 150,000 or 200,000 units. At that time, those were incredible numbers, and the game made Mindscape. Mindscape probably would have failed if they hadn't gotten *Balance Of Power*.

"And by the way, after that, my wife has never, ever said, 'Why don't you get a real job?'"



» [Amiga 500] The *1990 Edition* added another 20 countries, with smaller ones in Central America and the Middle East shown in a box on the left.

» [Amiga 500] Getting countries with higher prestige on your side will give you more prestige points than converting low-prestige nations.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

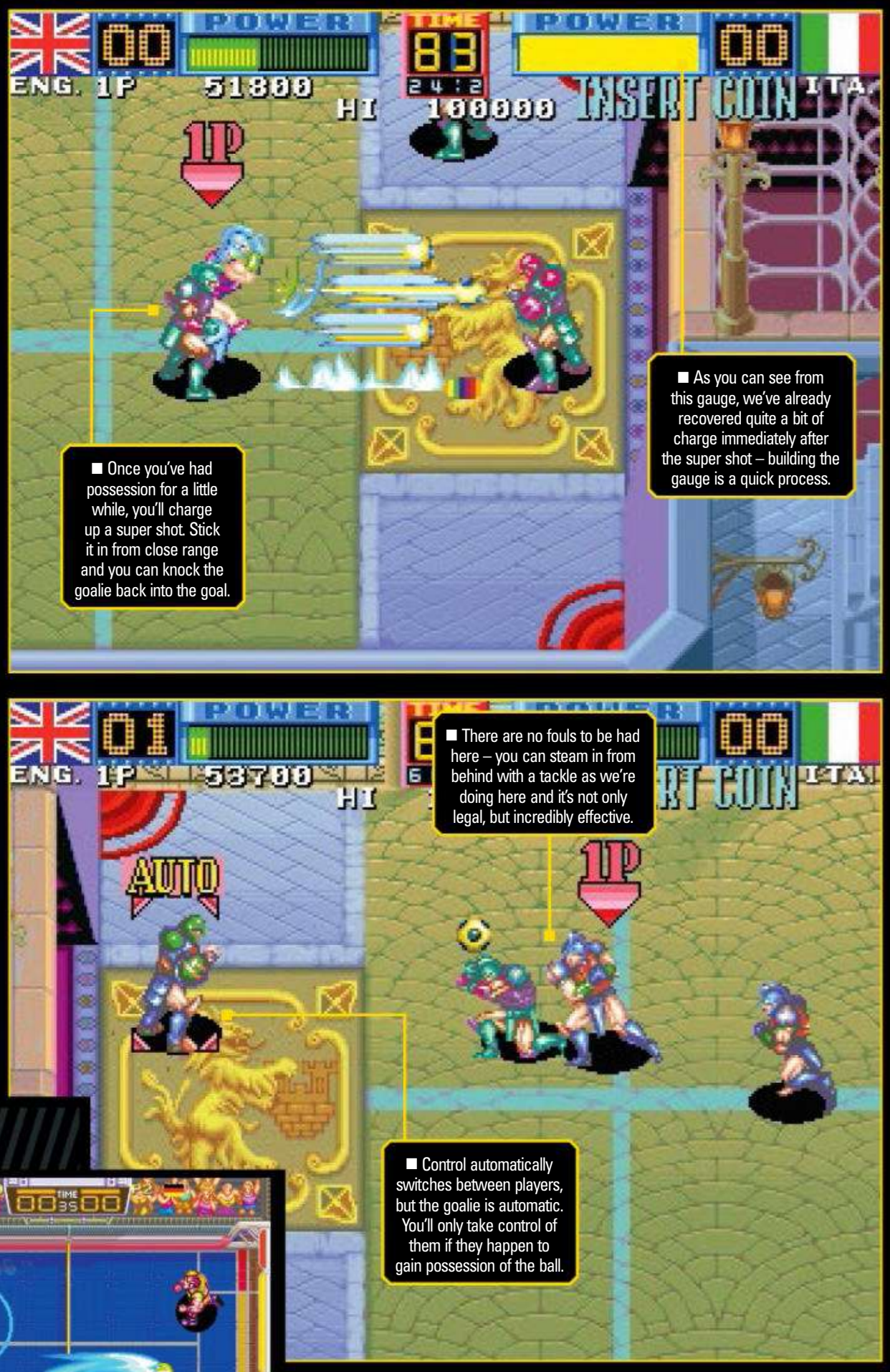
HEAVY SMASH

DEVELOPER: **DATA EAST** YEAR: **1993** GENRE: **SPORTS**

■ We love a good future sports game – give us some ridiculous body armour, an incredibly thin rulebook, a good dose of violence and you'll keep us amused for hours. Data East has done just that here, with a game that will instantly remind many players of the *Speedball* series. Much like the home computer classic, *Heavy Smash* tasks teams of players with carrying the ball in their hands, running it and passing it around with the ultimate aim of throwing it into the opposing team's goal to score a point. There are fewer players, the pitches are slightly smaller and the perspective is different, but the action is familiar. You can obviously win by having more points when the time is up, but the game will be ended early if either team gets six points ahead of the other.

Heavy Smash differs from *Speedball* in how the developers chose to deploy complexity. The pitches in *Heavy Smash* are simple – as in *Speedball*, there is no way to put the ball out of bounds, but there are no crazy features like teleporters or score bumpers. You can centre the ball in front of goal by throwing it into the corner, but that's about it. However, you have a greater degree of control. A dedicated jump button allows you to perform aerial shots and passes at any time, as well as diving kicks. Additionally, a power bar constantly charges, allowing players to perform super shots when they hold possession, and shoot projectiles when they don't. As you'd expect, the various international teams have varied statistics that clearly mean something in practice – we liked the speedy Australian team. They also all have their own gimmicks, reflected in each team's attire as well as the look of its home stadium.

It's a crying shame that *Heavy Smash* never got a home release, and we honestly can't work out why it didn't. The game seems to be within the capabilities of the contemporary 16-bit consoles, and this kind of fast and furious sports action would have been welcomed wherever it landed. Don't miss it.


POWER
TIME
83
24:2
POWER
ENG. 1P 51800
HI 100000
INSERT COIN
ITA
1P
■ Once you've had possession for a little while, you'll charge up a super shot. Stick it in from close range and you can knock the goalie back into the goal.
■ As you can see from this gauge, we've already recovered quite a bit of charge immediately after the super shot – building the gauge is a quick process.
ENG. 1P 53700
HI
AUTO
1P
■ There are no fouls to be had here – you can steam in from behind with a tackle as we're doing here and it's not only legal, but incredibly effective.
■ Control automatically switches between players, but the goalie is automatic. You'll only take control of them if they happen to gain possession of the ball.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

WINDJAMMERS

1994

■ Also developed by Data East, *Windjammers* is another pseudo-sports game known for its bright visuals and high-speed action – this time focusing on solo, single-screen gameplay. Big spenders will eye up the Neo Geo AES and CD versions, but Vita, PS4 and Switch versions are all available with online multiplayer.

ROAD BURNERS

DEVELOPER: **ATARI GAMES** YEAR: **1999** GENRE: **RACING**

■ **With the success of *San Francisco Rush* having revitalised the Atari Games brand in arcades, it made sense for the developer to try to expand that formula into other areas of racing.** Therefore, we have *Road Burners* – a game very much like its predecessor, but featuring motorbikes instead of cars. The game utilises a tilting bike cabinet and you can pop a wheelie by giving the throttle a couple of quick twists, but beyond that there's not a whole lot of difference.

This isn't too bad of a thing mind you, as the basic formula works – high speed and forgiving collisions always makes for instant thrills. It's a bit of a looker for the time, too. While some of the easier tracks are kind of visually bland for the most part, the shortcuts can take you into really wild territory, like blasting through a Las Vegas airport, and the high frame rate is always a positive. Unfortunately, regardless of whether you win or lose, you'll have to use a continue to play another track.

Other games from the company had home versions around the time this game was out, so we're guessing that despite being fun, *Road Burners* just didn't make tons of money in arcades.

» [Arcade] Get up close and personal with your rivals and you'll automatically punch and kick them.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SAN FRANCISCO RUSH

1996

■ PlayStation and N64 owners got a conversion of the original version of *San Francisco Rush*, with the latter being the one to go for. The later update, *San Francisco Rush: The Rock*, was released for the PC and also arrived on PS2, Xbox and GameCube as part of *Midway Arcade Treasures 3*.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ACTION FIGHTER

1986

■ Sega's shooter is commonly compared to *Spy Hunter* than it is to *Blazer*, thanks to its transforming car. However, the ground and air segments are what remind us of Namco's game. Conversions are available for Master System, ZX Spectrum, C64, Amstrad CPC, Amiga, Atari ST and PC.

BLAZER

DEVELOPER: **NAMCO** YEAR: **1987**
GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**

■ **Rather than being a bizarre game about the life of a piece of secondary school uniform, *Blazer* is a nifty little military-themed isometric shoot-'em-up that seems to be largely forgotten today.** The game initially feels a little slow and stodgy as you battle your way through a combined ground and air assault, but once you've made a little bit of progress up the battlefield it starts to open up, initially with a four-way shot power-up that makes your life a whole lot easier.

However, it's once your tank reaches the allied helicopter that you'll really start to have fun. Suddenly, you'll take control of the aircraft and be given freedom to blast all manner of airborne enemies, as well as bombing the heck out of the unfortunate tanks on the ground. You'll eventually land and return to the tank at the end of the stage, but this little double act continues throughout the game and serves to add enough variety to make it quite a memorable experience.

Despite being good fun, this one didn't just remain confined to the arcades – it didn't even officially leave Japan. That's a bit of a shame, as *Blazer* is a really solid blaster.

» [Arcade] Even in this tight maze structure, the four-way shot proves very useful indeed.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

LOGGER

DEVELOPER: **CENTURY** YEAR: **1982** GENRE: **PLATFORM**

■ **They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and there's a certain truth to that.** However, if the imitation is so bad that the very idea of it being passable becomes a mockery, the party being imitated probably wouldn't be particularly amused. Enter *Logger*.

Let's not beat around the bush – *Logger* is a big old rip-off of *Donkey Kong*, and surely one of the more brazen examples of plagiarism in arcade history. Trying to grab a piece of Nintendo's hit is one thing, but shamelessly copying the stage designs is quite another. Worse yet, it's actually considerably worse than *Donkey Kong* thanks to wonky controls and inferior visuals, so *Logger* is both ethically dodgy and a poor product. The only redeeming feature is the use of Monty Python's lumberjack song as a stage theme.

Ironically, while *Logger* never received an official home conversion, an unauthorised clone called *Log Run* was written for the VIC-20. We couldn't have imagined a better fate for this rather blatant example of idea theft.

» [Arcade] Few rip-offs have ever been quite so blatant as *Logger*'s feeble take on *Donkey Kong*.

THE MAKING AND REMAKING OF

MONSTER WORLD IV

AT THE TIME THOUGHT TO BE THE FINAL INSTALMENT IN THE WONDER BOY/MONSTER WORLD FRANCHISE, IT TOOK ROUGHLY 18 YEARS TO SEE AN OFFICIAL LOCALISATION. NOW, WITH THE EXCITEMENT AROUND ITS REMAKE, WE THOUGHT IT THE PERFECT TIME TO EXAMINE BOTH ASHA'S ORIGINAL AND UPDATED ADVENTURE

WORDS BY JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

Developed by Westone and released in April 1994 for Sega's Mega Drive, *Monster World IV* (hereafter *MWIV*) was intended as the final entry in the ridiculously convoluted *Wonder Boy* saga. Mild spoiler: after the heart-warming ending and credits, your genie companion congratulates you, stating this is the end of the overall series. At the time it was not released outside of Japan. But in 2012, roughly 18 years later, it received an official English localisation for modern platforms. A sequel (*Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom*) came out in 2018 and now we are about to see a remake of *MWIV* itself. So how did this so-called 'end of the series' come about?

Leafing through the sketchbooks of art director Maki Ohzora (see the We Love Maki Ohzora boxout) reveals drawings for both the genie and Queen Prapril characters dated November 1992. Meaning, at least conceptually, it had been forming for over a year. The studio had finished porting *The Dragon's Trap* to Game Gear, and entered a phase of making PC Engine CD-ROM titles. *Crest Of Wolf/Riot Zone* was released February 1993. After a long gap *MWIV* on Mega Drive came out April 1994, followed by PC Engine titles *Dynastic Hero* in May 1994 and *Blood Gear* in October that year. Looking through Westone's portfolio dates, provided by company head Ryuichi Nishizawa, shows a tangled web as confusing as the *Wonder Boy* series itself.

It's difficult even to say which number in the series *MWIV* actually is, what with it being the sixth mainline entry, plus multiple ports and rebrandings of its predecessors, not to mention the whole *Adventure Island* spin-off line (see our Definitive *Wonder Boy* article in issue 37). For the sake of consistency and easier understanding, we're changing all names to the English localised equivalent, even when examining them in the context of their Japanese release.

It's fascinating to see how every consecutive game – from *Wonder Boy* for arcades in April 1986, through to *MWIV* exactly eight years later – was an evolution or departure from what came before, reinventing itself while still remaining recognisable. Most often the level complexity and RPG mechanics expanded, apart from that one instance, *Monster Lair*, where it turned into a platforming shmup. Even so, despite change being inherent in the

» Ryuichi Nishizawa in Tokyo. Photographer: Nico Datiche

THE DYNAMIC DUO

GET THE MOST OUT OF ASHA AND PEPELOGOO

EasyGlide

■ Asha can glide by grabbing Pepelogoo mid-jump. Essential for navigating rooms and collecting treasure. Amusingly, after he grows large she has to cling to his belly.

Getting High

■ On her own Asha can jump well, and can even attack up or down. However, by grabbing Pepelogoo she can then perform a double jump!

Some Like It Hot

■ There are multiple lava fountains and steam vents. Pepelogoo likes heat so can rest on the lava or get bunged into a vent as a flying platform!

Button Licking Good

■ Standing next to a button allows Asha to easily press it. But if it happens to be out of reach she can send Pepelogoo to lick it for her.

I'm A Fire Quencher!

■ Putting out fires unlocks passageways. If a fire is too big for Pepelogoo to blow out, Asha can fill her little water bucket.

Come Up For Air

■ Isn't this adorable? Pepelogoo will save Asha from drowning in the Stream Sanctuary by plunging in deep and pulling her to the surface.

Heat Penetration

■ Is there nothing Pepelogoo can't do? When penetrating deep into the Ice Pyramids, these slabs will need melting before you can pass.

Vanilla Ice Cube

■ Don't you hate doors too high to reach? Luckily our puffy pal can be frozen into an ice cube and used as a makeshift platform.

Want To Know A Secret?

■ For players trying to find all the game's secrets, Pepelogoo will float above hidden doorways with a question mark by his head.

The Little Death

■ Possibly the most useful thing our blue buddy does is automatically use green healing medicine to revive Asha – thus preventing game over!

WE ♥ MAKI OHZORA

GIVING CREDIT TO THE ARTISTRY BEHIND ASHA

Born on 4 July 1968 in Saitama, Japan, Maki Ohzora initially wanted to be an artist for TV anime. Discovering it was tough to make a living at this she quit and, thanks to a friend working there, eventually ended up at Westone creating graphics. Her pixel artist predecessor was one of the company cofounders, Hiromi Suzuko, who later married to become Hiromi Kurihara and left sometime in the early Nineties. Maki Ohzora would then work alongside Ryuichi Nishizawa, producing graphics for many of the company's subsequent games.

Her first project was the arcade game *Aurail* (1990). Even though the artwork for *Monster World IV* is some of the cutest we've ever seen, Ms Ohzora is multi-talented with a wide range of styles, having also drawn the gritty backgrounds in *Riot City* and the impressive mecha cutscenes in *Blood Gear*.

Ryuichi Nishizawa described how Maki Ohzora single-handedly defined the look of *Monster World IV*, "During development of the original Mega Drive version, Ohzora-san drew all of Asha's character images by herself. There were many different types of actions and the total number of animation frames was quite large, but in order to maintain a high quality, there was no other way but to draw them all by herself."

Even more significantly, the series' first female protagonist is directly thanks to Ohzora. While the original plan was to have a male and female character, and memory limitations forced the team to cut one, the choosing of Asha as the hero was due to the art.

As Nishizawa explains, the art was so good he felt inclined to defy the zeitgeist, "At the time, there was an impression that games with female main characters were too soft and many people objected that this was not a good idea since we were targeting hardcore Sega fans, but the female characters drawn by Ohzora-san were so cute we decided to go ahead with it."

When not creating visuals for games Maki Ohzora produces a wide range of art, displaying her work at Japan's Comiket. Check out her Twitter profile: @maki_ohzora.

series, *MWIV* was an unexpected departure – to the extent it could easily have stood on its own as a unique unconnected title.

As in English, the Japanese have a series of shorthand words for describing far-reaching and deep concepts in game development. Two important terms which are at the heart of *MWIV* are 'jiyuudo' and 'sekaikan'.

Jiyuudo relates to degrees of freedom, encompassing linearity, customisation, complexity of mechanics and so on. Up until *MWIV* the level of jiyuudo in the series generally increased for each new game, with environments that were less linear, thus greater exploration, plus more equipment, a more diverse magic system and overall more options are available to the player. In surprising contrast *MWIV* stripped all this back – it was purer, closer to the first two *Wonder Boy* games, and very streamlined.

For director Nishizawa this was a deliberate decision, "While *Wonder Boy In Monster World* followed the same game system as *The Dragon's Trap*, it also had stronger RPG elements and a greatly increased volume of content. When I was planning *MWIV*, I thought it would be boring to do the same thing as before. Instead I wanted to entice and interest fans even more. The biggest change was to make it more action-oriented. The combat system, which determines the amount of damage you take from enemies, was simplified to make it easier for the player's abilities to lead to results. This means even with poor equipment, the game can be cleared to the end depending on the player's skill."

As before there are still stores to buy swords, shields and armour, using gold collected from enemies. Plus a few ancillary items to use, such as the statues in the Ice Pyramids. But despite the merchants and their wares, you don't have to acquire everything to reach the end. You have a robust set of attacks, including a downwards sword strike capable of stunlocking enemies, even bosses! Speedrunners for example upgrade their stuff once, early on, and then complete the game using this technique. More casual

» [Mega Drive] Asha meets Queen Prapril, who has her own cute yellow Pepelogoo creature.

players often don't even realise the ultimate set of equipment has been unlocked since it requires warping out of the last area and returning to town. Magic spells meanwhile, a reliable aid in previous games, are missing entirely. Instead players are reliant solely on their blade.

"That is because I wanted to create an adventure story with an emphasis on action," explains Nishizawa. "Another reason is that I didn't want Asha to be a magical character. I wanted Asha to be a brave girl with a rather petite stature who can stand up to great evil. To achieve this, I thought it would be better to fight with a sword and shield, while bumping into the enemy, rather than with magic that can be used for long-distance attacks. I think this was the right choice."

His reasoning behind the change is rather wonderful – by making combat exclusively sword-based, it enhances the idea that Asha is not only an everywoman, in the literary sense, but a strong and determined one.

It also brings up another of *MWIV*'s rather unexpected changes – our hero is in fact a heroine! Nishizawa recalls, "The reason why I chose to make a female main character instead of male is because, as I mentioned before, I wanted to surprise the fans in a good way. At the beginning of the project, either a male or female character was supposed to be chosen as the main character, but due to capacity constraints, one of the two had to be removed and I decided to keep the female character without hesitation."

The series had dabbled in female characters before, with the second player in *Monster Lair*, but now an entire game was crafted around a central heroine. Ohzora was in charge of animation and put a lot of effort into making Asha come alive, from the way she wiggles into water pipes to her jubilation after filling a bucket. Ohzora also revealed that the male character was not cut entirely – he was reworked into the robed fellows you meet in the Sky Castle.

With less focus on numbers and stats, and the requisite grinding to buy gear, *MWIV* leans more towards ambience than mechanics. With its uncomplicated mazes, faster pacing, cute protagonist and even cuter sidekick, *MWIV* is all about transferring its two main characters (and the player) through five beautiful dungeon zones, final boss-rush corridor and the hub-city of Rapadagna. After each dungeon falls you can never go back. It may have RPG trimmings, but these are just garnish.

Nishizawa agrees, "Yes, that's right, we made the platform action elements stronger than the RPG elements. In that sense, it's probably closer to *Wonder Boy* than the [preceding] *Monster World* series. *MWIV* is a game that features action in collaboration with Pepelogoo. In order to clear the stages, I didn't want ▶

» [Mega Drive] David Attenborough voice: here, in its native habitat, we see the birth of a small, blue Pepelogoo creature.

» [Mega Drive] Although the selectable male character had to be cut due to memory constraints, his sprite was modified and re-used here.

» [Mega Drive] There are still shops and merchants selling weapons and armour, but they're a little bit less important this time round.

» [Mega Drive] Run Asha, ruuuuuuun! Otherwise the fire is gonna burn your little shoes off!

» [Mega Drive] By working with Pepelogoo to double-jump and gain some height on bosses, Asha can perform a downwards strike and possibly combo it.

Asha's progress to be important, but rather her ability to work together with Pepelogoo. For this reason, we limited the gameplay elements to changing equipment and kept the RPG aspect to a minimum."

It's not an overly difficult game, so the pleasure is from experiencing this magical Arabian wonderland while developing a rapport and emotional connection with the adorable Pepelogoo. Although he starts off like an odd sort of pet, your dynamic interactions encourage a bond and he feels more like a friend.

Nishizawa previously explained his rationale for not including magic in the game; instead he replaced it with an eclectic range of cooperative abilities that Asha and Pepelogoo can perform together (see The Dynamic Duo boxout). Neither one alone can conquer the adventure and for the dungeon where you are without him, the Sky Castle, it is both a more challenging and lonely experience. Nishizawa took what had been simply inanimate tools in earlier entries, fireballs and the like, and interwove player mechanics with a narrative so that now every double jump, every button

» [Mega Drive] The corridor leading to the Stream Sanctuary is exquisite, featuring good use of contrasting colours and dappled lighting.

lick, every time your backside is pulled from the water, the sense of camaraderie grows. This sort of intimate player-led character interaction is only possible in videogames and, honestly, more powerful than any bond you'll form by reading a book or watching a TV series. It's a technique used previously in games like *A Boy And His Blob*, and is why much later games like *The Last Of Us* or *Moss* resonate so strongly today.

If you're thinking the inspiration for our cuddly blue buddy is something like Kirby, that may not be accurate. "Pepelogoo was designed by Ohzora-san," says Nishizawa. "I think my only order was to make the design as simple as possible. The design may have been based on the Haro robot companion that Amuro Ray has in *Gundam*. In my mind, the images overlap a bit." If you go through the *Gundam* series you'll find that Nishizawa is right, Pepelogoo's resemblance to the *Gundam* mascot is uncanny!

Now that we've examined a narrowing of the series' jiyuudo, we come to our second Japanese term: sekaikan. It loosely means world view or lore, and encompasses every aspect, even unspoken, of a game's internal culture. While the first in the series had an island castaway theme, the next four games all used a more traditional 'swords and spells' motif. *MWIV* though, adopted a radically different form of sekaikan.

"The world of swords and magic is usually set in medieval Europe, so I wanted to give it a twist, and the Arabian world was a big attraction for me," explains Nishizawa, showing designs he sketched on graph paper. "Because it allowed me to create images that were different from other fantasy RPGs. The shining sun, scorching desert, oases and camels, ethnic costumes and half-moon swords – called

» [Mega Drive] You better explore the dungeons for these Life Drops fully, because once the boss is defeated there's no going back!

shamshir – there are so many exciting things to imagine. I think it was a good decision to choose the Arabian world for the game's art."

It was a masterful decision, since while other games of the era can today seem almost indistinguishable from each other, a vast crowd of Tolkien rip-offs, *MWIV* shines out as a jewel of originality. Not just conceptually, but also thanks to artwork and pixel graphics so gorgeous it belies the hardware's palette limit of only 61 colours on-screen at once (three are reserved for transparencies). In fact we counted the colours on several screenshots – would you believe some of the best shown here use less than 45 colours?

"It's a game released at the end of the Mega Drive era," says Nishizawa, somewhat downplaying the amazing talent of his team. "From a developer's point of view, this was a time when we had a deeper understanding of the hardware and had accumulated enough know-how to figure out how to achieve a high quality. In particular, the Mega Drive had a special colour scheme, so if you were good at using colours, the entire screen would look beautiful. For the same reason, many titles that are considered masterpieces were created at the end of the Mega Drive era. *Silpheed* is probably the best example of this. Although it came on CD-ROM, it showed the amazing drawing capabilities of the Mega Drive."

» [Mega Drive] Don't mess up like us – carefully navigate between these torrents of water to collect the coins.

» [Mega Drive] This is the inventory screen. Notice how much simpler it is. Honestly, we miss the depth of the previous RPG instalments.

UPGRADING MONSTER WORLD

RYUICHI NISHIZAWA ON UPDATING A CLASSIC

The Third Dimension

"I decided a long time ago that if I was going to remake the *Monster World* series, I would use 3D for the visuals. This requires high-quality modelling."

Revisiting Dungeons

"In the original, once you defeated a boss you could not revisit that dungeon. Now you can, to retrieve any Life Drops you missed."

Visible Equipment

You can now see your equipped weapon. "The initial equipment is different, so the difficulty level at the beginning of the game is different."

Can You Hear Voices?

"At the beginning of development there was a feeling of 'I really want to hear Asha's voice', so it was unanimously decided Asha should have a voice."

Improved HUD

Not only are hearts, Life Drops and gold presented more discretely than before, allowing for more screen space, but bosses and enemies display a health bar for easier dispatch.

When *MWIV* finally hit stores, Japanese magazine reviews were good but not outstanding. *Famitsu* scored it 27/40, with its four reviewers giving 6/6/8/7. In fairness to Asha, her direct predecessor on Mega Drive (*Wonder Boy In Monster World*) also scored only 27 in *Famitsu*. *The Dragon's Trap* meanwhile, generally considered the best in the series, scored as low as 23. The magazine *Beep! MegaDrive* scored *MWIV* similarly, with 6/7/8/8. Meanwhile *MegaDrive Fan* was much more generous, scoring it 24 out of 30 (equivalent to 8/10). Due to not being released outside of Japan, the only English language reviews were by magazines covering imports: *GameFAN*'s three reviewers were enamoured, scoring it 92/88/86, and lamenting the fact that it wasn't coming over.

Did Nishizawa know people outside of Japan loved it? "The Mega Drive version of *MWIV* was released in Japan 27 years ago, but it was never released overseas," he admits. "The English version for the Wii Virtual Console, released in 2012, was the first official release overseas. Considering this fact, it's quite a strange phenomenon that the Mega Drive version is considered a masterpiece outside of Japan!"

He adds, in a somewhat hushed tone, "As I'm sure you know, there were actually fans who translated the Japanese version into English long before the official release, and this English version of *MWIV* spread in a way that is difficult to say publicly. Perhaps the reaction to the game not being released overseas led to the creation of such dedicated fans? This was a great experience for the team."

By now you'll have seen trailers for *Wonder Boy – Asha In Monster World*, published by ININ Games for PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch. STUDIOARTDINK's game looks to be a beautiful remake of *Monster World IV* (which is also included with physical copies). Given that the original initially didn't leave Japan, we need to acknowledge three important landmarks: the 2018 sequel, *Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom*, for stoking interest, and *The Dragon's Trap* remake by Lizardcube in 2017, for showing the viability of remaking the series and the official English release of *MWIV*, way back in 2012. It was this release, above all others, that introduced gamers to Asha and paved the way for this remake.

Series creator Ryuichi Nishizawa explains how it happened, "The English translation was produced by Sega's Okunari-san and SOE staff. I wrote the scenario for the Japanese version, so I can imagine how difficult it was to translate, because there are many parts of the story text that can only be expressed in Japanese. I used to think games would die out with the demise of the hardware, but in reality, they are ported to new hardware and enjoyed by a new generation of fans. I was very impressed by that."

» [PS4] The cel-shaded polygonal models match the style of the original game well, and look great in motion.

FAMILY MATTERS

Assault Suit Leynos

■ At Masaya, Toshirou Tsuchida produced *Kai-Serd* as a crossover with *Assault Suit Leynos*. Tsuchida went to Square, helming the popular *Front Mission* franchise. Some Leynos staff made the sequel *Valken* (*Cybernator* here), others went to Omiya Soft creating *Gun Hazard*, which is the second *Front Mission* game. *Kai-Serd* had a sequel, *Vixen 357* and there was also *Leynos 2* and *Valken 2*.

Aleste

■ Well this is complicated! *Zanac*, led to *Zanac EX*, then *Aleste*, AKA *Power Strike*, then an upgraded *Aleste* and *Aleste Gaiden*. *Aleste 2* sadly wasn't localised; *Power Strike II* (no relation) was released in Europe. *GG Aleste II* became *Power Strike II*. *Dennin* became *Robo*; *Super* became *Space Megaforce*. Don't forget *Gun-Nac* or *Musha* or *Zanac X Zanac*. We're going to have a rest now.

Dragon Slayer

■ Yoshio Kiya created *Panorama-Toh*, a prototype JRPG leading to *Dragon Slayer* across computers. *Xanadu* was subtitled *DS II*, *Romancia* subtitled *DS Jr*. Don't forget *Faxanadu*. *Legacy Of The Wizard* was officially *DS IV*, while *Sorcerian* is regarded as *DS V*. *Dragon Slayer* on PC Engine is actually *The Legend Of Heroes*. And on the subject of PC Engine, there is also *The Legend Of Xanadu* series.

Alex Kidd

■ We've covered this, so let's leave it there [Don't be so flipping lazy! – Ed]. OK, there was *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* and *Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars*, was developed concurrently with the same planned mascot, but different concepts. *The Lost Stars* was followed by *BMX Trial*, *High-Tech World* (actually an *Anmitsu Hime* reskin), proper sequel *Enchanted Castle*, and the fun crossover *Shinobi World*.

Given that *MWIV* was translated, ported and released as a download across modern systems, we had to ask: why remake it? "When we first planned the project, we were going to remake one of the four titles in the *Monster World* series," reveals Nishizawa. "There was some talk of doing [its predecessor] *Wonder Boy In Monster World*, but we finally settled on *MWIV*. With the unique characters of Asha and Pepelogoo, we thought it would be easier to reach not only fans of the original, but also a new fanbase. Another major deciding factor was that Ohzora-san, who designed the characters in the original game, could join us."

What's immediately apparent about the remake is how good it looks. The static screenshots shown here are nice, but they don't convey the fluidity of the animation when in motion. **Retro Gamer** has been covering remakes since its inception, and for fans there has always been the concern of them deviating too much, or not doing enough to warrant their existence. So it's a relief to say that this remake, if nothing else, has absolutely nailed that perfect sweet spot for visuals. Nishizawa was acutely aware, maybe even a little nervous, of the importance of this. "If a quick glance at a screenshot makes you think 'Asha is not cute', then it's over. How can we create high-quality images? This has been an important issue that will determine the success or failure of this project."

He also explained the need to move on from animating 2D sprites by hand to working with 3D, "It's far more efficient when I'm creating game images during the 'look development' phase; 3D is much more likely than 2D to produce high-quality visuals and I had some concrete ideas to make that happen. Unlike the 16-bit era, today's game platforms handle an unbelievably large amount of information. If we used the older methods for this project, we would need three more clones of Ohzora-san! [laughs]"

The music is also being enhanced. Though one slightly confusing aspect is the fact Westone composer Shinichi Sakamoto is helming the soundtrack. Of course Sakamoto was responsible for most of the *Wonder Boy* series, from *Monster Land* onwards, but it's weird because the *MWIV* music was actually done by then-newcomer Jin Watanabe. Although Watanabe is credited on work after *MWIV*, he doesn't seem to be involved with this remake.

Sakamoto tried to clear up any confusion, "Back when the main character in *MWIV* changed from a boy to a girl, I wanted to incorporate new ideas into the music. I also wanted to hear how Watanabe-san would express himself with the series. I think he did a great job creating a new atmosphere while keeping the tradition of the series in mind. He was ambitious enough to give us something spicy for the music, yet was good at understanding the situation and composing the right kind of music. This is actually a very difficult thing to do. That's why I entrusted the original project to him. For this new soundtrack, I wondered what Watanabe-san had wanted to express beyond the limitations of the Mega Drive. In other words, I wanted to compose intensely without losing any of the original qualities of his music."

Beyond just visual and audio overhauls, there are gameplay improvements planned. Nishizawa explained, "In planning the remake, we not only updated the visuals, but also tackled the issue of improving the things that we felt were unsatisfactory in the original." He then described how in the original players could not re-enter finished dungeons to collect any remaining Life Drops – now they can. This should also remedy

[PS4] Strictly Limited Games and ININ Games are releasing physical versions of *Wonder Boy: Asha In Monster World* for Switch and PS4. Look out for them now.

THE INSANE COMPLEXITY OF THE WONDER BOY/ADVENTURE ISLAND FAMILY TREE IS WELL-KNOWN – BUT WHAT OTHER DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES ARE THERE IN GAMING?

Roland

■ Named after Amstrad's Roland Perry, this was the company's attempt to create a mascot. All start with the name 'Roland', followed by *Ahoy!*, *On The Ropes*, *In The Caves*, *Goes Digging*, *Goes Square Bashing*, *On The Run*, *In Time* and *In Space*. If you want to know more about this popular Amstrad series, you can read our in-depth coverage on page 38 of this very issue. The stars have aligned…

Sabreman

■ The *Sabreman* series by Ultimate Play The Game (now Rare) is weird because it's a collection of seemingly disparate games which are all different. You have *Sabre Wulf*, *Underwurlde* and *Knight Lore* on computers – all distinct. The Japanese *Knight Lore* on FDS is entirely different. *Pentagram* resembles *Knight Lore*; *Mire Mare* was unreleased. *Sabre Wulf* on GBA is again unique.

Renegade

■ Where to begin… can we skip this? [Come on, finish the boxout! – Ed]. We've seen reports there are 30 titles in the series, we lost count after 40. It started with *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun* which became *Renegade*. European sequels *Target: Renegade* and *Renegade III* are weird cousins. Russians thought *Target: Renegade* on NES was officially *Double Dragon IV*. The American *River City Ransom* became *Street Gangs*.

Bubble Bobble

■ The sequel to *Bubble Bobble* was *Rainbow Islands*. Then there was *Parasol Stars* which was subtitled *The Story Of Bubble Bobble III*. Except in Europe where it was subtitled *Rainbow Islands 2*. There's also *Bubble Bobble Part 2*, which is not *Rainbow Islands*. Then *Bubble Memories: The Story Of Bubble Bobble III*. *Puzzle Bobble* is a puzzler. Bubble bath is a soap that makes foam.

» [PS4] The double-jump is essential for larger gaps, but it's also a nice learning aid for new or younger players.

» [PS4] As before, Asha and Pepelogoo will need to cooperate if they want to finish their adventure.

the nasty bug from the original, where if you warped out of the second Ice Pyramid, without completing it first, you could not re-enter thus rendering the game unwinnable.

Nishizawa espoused the many other quality of life improvements he and his team are including, "Collecting the Life Drops has been enhanced. The total number that appear in the game has been increased from 150 to 200 and the number of Life Drops obtained in each area can now be checked. The number of heart vending machines in the dungeon is also different. The biggest difference, however, is that Easy Mode has an automatic coin collection function. At the beginning of development, the game was designed to automatically collect coins dropped by enemies without the player having to get them, but unexpectedly many people complained this was not like *Monster World*, so we decided to add a mode where the player can go and get the coins themselves. Easy Mode is automatic collection, Normal Mode is self-collection."

Another addition is voice acting. This might be somewhat contentious, since fans of the original will have each formed a different voice for Asha in their mind, but Nishizawa reassures us it's not a problem. "There is no dialogue for Asha, so her action voices and exclamation expressions – such as 'Yeah!' and 'Yaaaah!' – are used to show her character. The actress who voiced Asha, Ai Fairouz, was the first choice of producer Saito-san. He wanted her to be the voice of Asha for a long time. "For this project we asked her to play a total of 29 characters, including not only Asha, but also Pepelogoo and Queen Prapril. When I witnessed her voice recordings in the studio, and saw how she played different characters one after another, I thought she was a complete professional. It was really amazing."

Given the addition of voice acting, it's natural there will be new cutscenes to convey the story. "The characters, setting and scenario are exactly the same as the original," confirms Nishizawa, "but the way they are expressed has been changed in a richer way. Although the people, places and dialogues are the same as the original, the 3D images, camera movements and zooming have succeeded in adding depth to the story and character descriptions. If you are familiar with the original story, there are many scenes that will make you smile, and I hope you will experience them. The climactic ending will make you cry more than you think. I was so moved that I cried. I think I was able to express a part of the ideal remake in this scene."

With the release soon upon us, and impressed with what we've seen, we will leave the last word to the creator himself, Ryuichi Nishizawa, "This remake was developed with the goal of delighting fans of the original and, at the same time, appealing to those who are not familiar with it. The visuals are in full 3D, but the gameplay is the same fun 2D platform action. We believe this is the ideal remake of *MWIV*, so please come and experience the adventures of Asha and Pepelogoo."

Amiga CD32 Controller

» **PLATFORM:** Amiga CD32 » **RELEASED:** 1993
» **COST:** £16.99 (launch), £70+ (today, boxed) £50+ (today, unboxed)

Commodore's attempt to repackage the Amiga hardware in console form wasn't a bad idea – the system was a fine gaming platform, and the company was facing an uncertain future in the home computer market. But some things had to be done to improve the system's viability in the console space, and one of them was addressing the control situation. For years, Amiga owners had been expected to make use of joysticks with just one or two buttons, which just wasn't enough for the latest arcade conversions. To that end, Commodore created a new pad for the CD32, with a digital directional pad, four face buttons and two shoulder buttons. An upward-curving body completed the futuristic look.

While the pad had plenty of buttons, the fatal flaw was its durability. The d-pad would inevitably fail after extended use, and as a result many CD32 pads are broken today, with those tested and working attracting a high price. Worse still, the supply of replacement controllers soon dried up thanks to Commodore's 1994 bankruptcy, leaving players to rely on third-party options like the Boomerang and Competition Pro controllers. If you're looking for a CD32 pad today, they're more reliable than this official option.

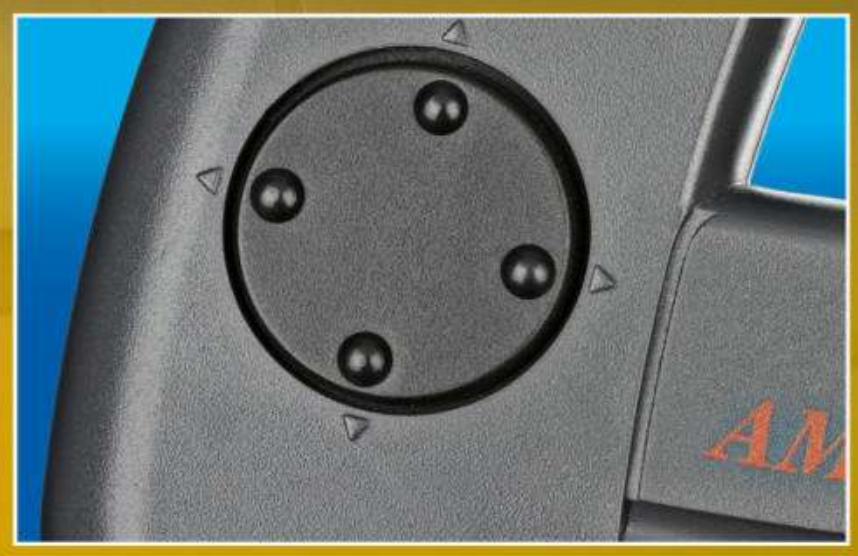
Amiga CD32 Controller fact

- The common cause of failure for CD32 controllers is breakage of the d-pad locating tabs. These tend to rattle around in the controller while the disc-shaped pad slips around.

ESSENTIAL GAME

ULTIMATE BODY BLOWS

Fighting games were a big driver of the move towards controllers with six or more buttons, so it's only fitting that a fighting game provides a great example of how CD32 games could utilise expanded control options. Rather than trying to cram everything into a single-button configuration as the original *Body Blows* and *Body Blows Galactic* had needed to, the final version of Team17's fighter gives you separate buttons for punches, kicks, special moves and guarding. That goes a long way towards making it a more pleasant experience than its predecessors, before you even factor in the other improvements that were made.



SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Eidos

In the mid-Nineties, it would have been difficult to avoid the name 'Eidos'. You would see the logo on Manchester City football kits and when a game would boot on a PlayStation console. However, you can't talk about Eidos without mentioning Domark...

WORDS BY DARYL BAXTER

Mark Strachan and Dominic Wheatley were working at an advertising agency, when they decided to set up their own business in the gaming industry. "My younger brother had bought a Commodore 64 in January of 1983, [he] was playing *Heroes Of Khan*, and I was watching him type in certain commands to progress, and I was just amazed," cofounder Dominic says of the early days.

This was the turning point where Dominic decided to pitch the idea of this games business to Mark Strachan, "I took him out to the pub, and said I had this idea, and we agreed to go to this cottage near Goodrich Castle in Wales with our girlfriends, and we drew up a business plan there and then, which became Domark."

At this point the pair both decided to leave the agency together and moved into a small office in Monster Road to try and raise money. Around 1983, Dominic came up with an idea for a game that was more interactive to the player, and this was where Ian Livingstone CBE came in.

Ian had cofounded Games Workshop in 1975 with Steve Jackson, and he had an opportunity to write a book based upon a chance meeting in 1979. "Penguin Books had taken a stand at a 'Games Day' event at the Royal Horticultural Hall in London, and we talked to their editor, Geraldine Cooke," recalls Ian. "She asked if we'd be interested in writing a book about role-playing games." Both Ian and Steve agreed and the book evolved into the acclaimed *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*.

This led to other published titles in the *Fighting Fantasy* series, which became extremely popular and are still being made today. This is where Domark took notice, and contacted Ian. Dominic recalls he had been looking to "try and push this idea of a game where the player could win rewards by phoning in, and Dave Bishop was our PR guy who knew Ian", which led to a meeting at the headquarters of Games Workshop. As Dominic and Mark were still raising money, Ian "wrote a check for £10,000, one of our earliest investors, and soon after that we became friends".

An agreement was made where Ian would write the storylines, and his name would also be displayed on the box art. "I set about working on a concept for a graphical adventure game about solving a history-spanning mystery which I called *Eureka!*" Ian recalls. It was created by developer Novotrade in Hungary, and published by Domark in

» This photo was during the development of the first *Tomb Raider* game, circa-1996.

» The original logo of the company in 1984, founded by both Dominic and Mark, dreamt up in Wales.

» This would be the commonly-known logo of Eidos, especially during the PlayStation era in the Nineties.

KEY GAMES

EUREKA!
C64, ZX Spectrum
1984

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER
PC, Amiga, Atari ST
1992

TOMB RAIDER
PlayStation, PC, Saturn
1996

SWAGMAN
PlayStation, Saturn
1997

FIGHTING FORCE
PlayStation, PC, N64
1997

THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT
PC
1998

COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES
PC - 1998

DEATHTRAP DUNGEON
PC, PlayStation
1998

FINAL FANTASY VII
PC
1998

GEX: ENTER THE GECKO
PlayStation
1998

» [PlayStation] *Tomb Raider* was filled with great moments like Lara facing the now-iconic T-Rex in the Lost Valley level.

» [PC] While a buggy game to begin with, *Championship Manager 2* was the breakout success that Domark needed. A sequel appeared in 1999.

» An advertisement for *Eureka!* dreamed up by Ian and Dominic, which was released in 1984.

» Ian Livingstone (left) poses with *Tomb Raider*'s creator, Toby Gard for the launch of *Tomb Raider: Legend*.

October of 1984, which led to good, but not huge success for the company.

"It did enough," reflects Dominic, "but it didn't set us up for life. We had put our heart and soul into launching it on the Spectrum and Commodore, so after Christmas we felt as if we were in a bit of a limbo." Domark decided to go into licensing, releasing a videogame adaption of the latest *James Bond* film, *A View To A Kill*, which also did good, but wasn't the big hit Domark wanted

However, the company kept pushing on, looking to see how it could surpass its competitors. "We ended up doing *Star Wars*, a home version of the Atari coin-op game, which sold like a rocket ship, alongside another game that did much better than we thought," admits Dominic. "It did so well, that a bunch of Atari executives showed up." Dominic made a deal so that when an Atari coin-op released, the home version would be published by Domark, with an advance payable of $50,000.

This kept Domark in good stead, up until 1992 when there was space for a football management simulator game. Dominic was sceptical whether another would fit in the market, but it wasn't until their financial manager, Jeremy Bard, was constantly visiting the test room of a focus audience, just to try out what would become *Championship Manager*, that he changed his mind.

Around this time, Ian decided to move into the games industry fully, "*Eureka!* was a move that would be instrumental in my change of career post-Games Workshop in the Nineties. Following a management buyout in 1991, I left Games Workshop to begin a new career in videogames. I joined Domark in 1992 as vice chairman following my investment in the company," he tells us.

While the Sega Mega Drive and Super Nintendo battled it out in the 16-bit console wars during this time, *Championship Manager* was suddenly a big priority for the company so its focus stayed on home computers. "The game released on the Amiga, Atari ST and PC/MS-DOS, and it was one of the most modest launches we ever had," Dominic admits. He had already made a deal with the game's creators, Paul and Oliver Collyer, or the Collyer brothers, to have Domark publish the game across these three systems, and they had been given a £5,000 advance for their efforts.

Dominic recalls creating the box art, where "we had saved a cigar, went to Wembley Stadium,

LEGACY OF KAIN: SOUL REAVER
PlayStation, PC, Dreamcast
1999

AKUJI THE HEARTLESS
PlayStation
1998

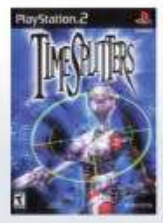
DEUS EX
PC
1999

DAIKATANA
PC
2000

FEAR EFFECT
PlayStation
2000

HITMAN: CODENAME 47
PC
2000

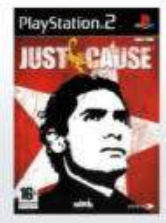
TIMESPLITTERS
PLayStation 2
2000



PROJECT EDEN
PlayStation 2, PC
2001

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS
PlayStation 2, PC
2003

JUST CAUSE
PlayStation 2, Various
2006



TOMB RAIDER LEGEND
PlayStation 2, Various
2006

» [PlayStation] *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver* faced many delays until its release in 1999, however it was critically acclaimed.

» [PC] *Deus Ex* was a big success for Ion Storm following the disaster of *Daikatana*, after Eidos had invested 51% into the studio in 1999.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

IAN LIVINGSTONE

■ Ian became a CBE in 2013 and is now a partner in Hiro Capital, which helps fund game studios looking to grow. He's also the chairman of Sumo Group PLC, alongside being a non-executive director for Flavourworks, Antstream, Fusebox, Midoki, The Secret Police and Polyarc. He's currently writing a new *Fighting Fantasy* book, alongside *Dice Men* with Steve Jackson, which charts the first ten years of Games Workshop.

DOMINIC WHEATLEY

■ After advising several companies following his departure from Eidos in 1997, Dominic is currently the CEO of Catalis, a company composed of Testronic and Curve Digital. His role is making sure that both companies have heavy involvement in the gaming space, while looking at other companies to acquire and build upon.

MARK STRACHAN

■ After leaving Eidos in 1995, Mark was appointed chairman of Ubisoft UK between 1995 and 1999, then cofounded Gameplay in 1999. Soon after taking the company public, he was made a non-executive director of In2Games in 2005 (a gaming publisher and hardware manufacturer). His current whereabouts are unknown.

▶ with this actor dressed in this huge camel-coat just posing and gesturing as if he was giving obscenities to the cameraman".

The game was a steady success. It was selling in the few thousands, but word of mouth, especially by the game magazines of the time, helped spread this, and soon Domark was trying to catch up with the back orders from stores and companies. "This was getting crazy," Dominic recalls, "and by Christmas the first big royalty check to the Collyer brothers was in the region of $75,000, it was hugely significant for them."

> "WE STAYED WITH THE NAME EIDOS, MAINLY BECAUSE IT WAS ON THE TICKER ON THE STOCK EXCHANGE, SO WE JUST LEFT IT AS IT WAS"
>
> **DOMINIC WHEATLEY**

A sequel would inevitably follow in 1995, however it was plagued with bugs at launch, which Dominic puts down to "the coding, which was just terrible. The team was just very inexperienced, but they knew their football". However, in 1995 the spokes were starting to fly off. Domark was about to face the 32-bit era, and it simply wasn't ready. This was where the decision to reverse into a shell called Eidos would begin.

"Some of those years were really tough, as we saw other gaming companies go public and take off, but we were at the starting line essentially," Dominic recalls, so after meeting Charles Cornwall where he floated the idea of merging Domark with his shell company, they decided to go for it. "We stayed with the name Eidos, mainly because it was on the ticker on the stock exchange, so we just left it as it was," Dominic says. Soon after, CentreGold caught the company's attention, which had recently bought a Derby company called Core Design. This was where Ian first saw *Tomb Raider*.

"Eidos was in the process of acquiring CentreGold, so I was visiting their studios to look at current projects," he tells us. "When I arrived at Core, I was greeted by the managing director, Jeremy Heath-Smith, who showed me around the studio so I could review all the games in development. But it wasn't until I entered the last room that the jaw-dropping moment happened. In a corny way you could say it was love at first sight. There was Lara Croft on a screen; running, jumping, climbing, exploring and fighting her way through beautifully-crafted levels."

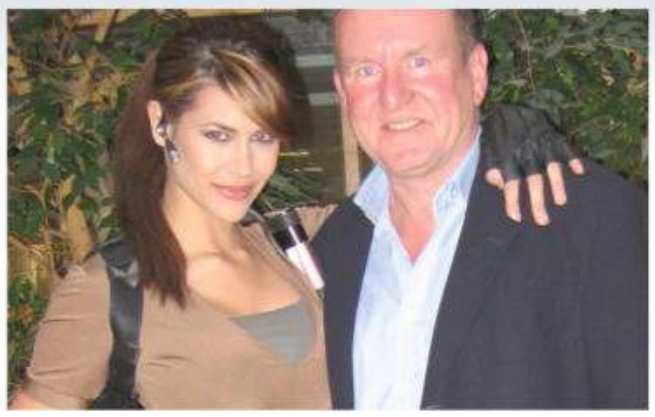
Ian was in awe, this was a powerful 3D character navigating a 3D world, and the main character, Lara Croft was the star. Ian knew Eidos had to buy CentreGold, mainly for Core Design, and in 1996, that's exactly what happened. "We were always looking to increase the IP titles in our portfolio, but we knew *Tomb Raider* was special," he proudly tells us.

Dominic recalls his high point of when he knew *Tomb Raider* would be a success, at E3 in 1996. "People would be in awe of this character running, swimming and shooting across this 3D environment, and others would come up to me, saying that it will be a runaway hit, and it was."

With the first game selling millions soon after its release in 1996, it transformed Core Design and Eidos into a juggernaut. Eidos had already agreed an exclusivity agreement with Sony to develop further *Tomb Raider* games for the PlayStation, however Eidos was still looking at companies to acquire. This was where Dominic noticed that the

» [PlayStation] One of the first 3D games to be released by Crystal Dynamics after its acquisition, *Gex: Enter The Gecko* moved the series from 2D into 3D.

THE DNA OF EIDOS



MARKETING

■ From dressing up a man in a camel-coat at Wembley Stadium to having Lara Croft on the cover of *The Face* magazine, Eidos knew how to market its prized assets and aim them towards a specific audience.

ACQUISITIONS

■ The acquisitions of certain companies made Eidos the juggernaut it came to be in the mid-Nineties, showcasing IP such as *Tomb Raider*, *Legacy Of Kain* and *Gex*, just to name a few.

» [PC] *Deathtrap Dungeon* was Ian Livingstone's pet project to bring *Fighting Fantasy* into a 3D game, but it wasn't to be.

company was beginning to falter. "In 1997, a year after Eidos went public, I felt like I didn't have the control as I once did. Mistakes were being made, such as financing John Romero's *Daikatana*, and while we had acquired Crystal Dynamics, they had good games, but were mainly struggling with *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver*."

Other people in the company began to lose focus, looking into what else Eidos could do, from trying to acquire a record label, to a CGI Studio, and Dominic kept trying to enforce the fact that "we are a videogames company, that's it". But by mid-1997, he had enough, and stepped down from the company. During this time, Ian was trying to transform his *Deathtrap Dungeon* book into a game, which he says, "Sold well, but not as well as *Tomb Raider*. The main problem was that it was developed by an inexperienced team. They ended up building an action game which was fun in itself but lacked the RPG component I wanted."

Everything was coming apart at the seams, and as the years passed, Eidos was losing money fast. Interest in *Tomb Raider* was dwindling, and it came to a head with the 2003 debut of the long-delayed *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, which, while showing potential, released in a very buggy state, almost killing the franchise, along with Eidos. Ian saw the potential of the game regardless, and to this day speaks of regret about how it turned out. "*Angel Of Darkness* looked incredible, and had so much to offer, but the team at Core just burnt out, and unfortunately Eidos pushed for the game to release in 2003, which was a mistake."

» [PC] While not received well critically, *Hitman: Codename 47* served as the foundation for what the series would become.

Not long after this, Eidos was suffering even more losses. The time came when Eidos was acquired by SCi in 2005, in a method that ironically bolstered the company's arsenal just ten years previously, something that Ian moots as a low point in his time at the company.

However, Ian and Dominic still remember the good times, and how well the company did in the Nineties, especially with the *Tomb Raider* series. "Not every *Tomb Raider* has been great," says Ian when reflecting on the games, "but Lara Croft, like James Bond in cinema, has survived the test of time. Her fanbase is as strong as ever, and her future star power is assured."

Without Eidos in the Nineties, there would be far fewer franchises that would be around today, such as *Deus Ex*, *Hitman* and even *Legacy Of Kain*. Eidos acquired companies that showed potential, and ultimately Eidos itself was acquired, left to a bittersweet memory, but one that still has plenty of nostalgia for a company that spawned many successful franchises.

TOMB RAIDER

■ The series that transformed Core Design and ultimately Eidos, with over nine million copies of the first game sold, and the subsequent games transforming Lara into a gaming icon. While *The Angel Of Darkness* marked the end of Core Design's involvement, Lara is still going strong 25 years later.

PLAYSTATION

■ At the start of the Nineties, you would have been hard-pressed to encounter a game that didn't begin with the Eidos Interactive FMV that would be the prelude to the game. PlayStation and Eidos went hand in hand.

PUBLISHING

■ Having a game marketed and released while the developer would only focus on its game would be a huge relief for many developers. *TimeSplitters*, *Hitman* and *Just Cause* would hugely benefit from this arrangement.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Twisted Metal: World Tour

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION » **RELEASED:** 1996 » **DEVELOPER:** SINGLETRAC

If you had a moment to stop and think, you might note what an odd feeling it was to be battling it out in rocket-powered death cars to the sound of *Frère Jacques*. But you *don't* have a moment to stop and think, as the likes of Mr Grimm and Grasshopper pursue you through the streets of Paris. And as you're chased into the teleporter that leads to the Eiffel Tower, your only desire is to get those guys off your tail. In desperation, you drop a remote bomb in there and plummet off the side of the tower.

It's only once you're safely on the ground that you realise the consequences of your actions. As you detonate that sucker, the explosion sounds rather more forceful than usual, so you turn around to see the whole tower explode, before dramatically toppling onto a nearby building – and in the process, opening up access to the rooftops of the French capital. As our cross-channel cousins might exclaim, zut alors!

BIO

Twisted Metal: World Tour – or *Twisted Metal 2*, if you're in North America – is the sequel to the PlayStation's original vehicular combat hit, which takes the battle from the streets of Los Angeles to the world stage. Iconic new vehicles like Axel and Twister join the battle against returning favourites like Outlaw and Warthog, in brand-new locations including Hong Kong, New York, Moscow and even the Antarctic. The game is arguably the pinnacle of the series on the original PlayStation, as the original developer Singletrac wasn't involved in the subsequent games, being replaced by Sony's internal 989 Studios team.

MORE TWISTED METAL: WORLD TOUR MOMENTS

Come On And Slam

Twisted Metal: World Tour broadened the vehicle selection nicely, with some more outlandish combatants joining the regular road users of the first game. Our favourite was Mr Slam, an excavator that could pick up the opposition with its giant claw and pound them into the pavement as a special attack.

Climate Catastrophe

Things aren't going so well for your fight in Antarctica – not only are you being pursued by the bloodthirstiest drivers outside of an M25 tailback, the effects of global warming are even working against you. Extra caution is required as parts of the glacier you're fighting on will detach and sink into the ocean.

Ice Scream Truck

While Sweet Tooth is a returning competitor from the original game, you can't pick it regularly. However, you can blow it up in the main game. Once you do, you're informed that you've killed someone's son, leading to the arrival of the terrifying Dark Tooth. Good luck outrunning those missiles, punk.

Is Victory Sweet?

Twisted Metal: World Tour's prize is the granting of any wish you desire. Of course Calypso isn't about to let you just enjoy yourself, so many of the endings take on a nasty twist as the diabolical tournament sponsor interprets the desires of his contestants all too literally, with deadly consequences.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

POWER STONE

BREAKING OUT OF THE RING OF THE TRADITIONAL FIGHTING GAME, CAPCOM'S FULLY 3D BRAWLER WAS COLOURFUL CHAOS, TRANSFORMING A HARDCORE ARCADE GENRE INTO AN ACCESSIBLE PARTY SMASH. JOIN US BACK IN AN AGE OF ADVENTURE TO TRACK DOWN THIS FORGOTTEN GEM

WORDS BY ALAN WEN

In 1999, 3D fighting games were hardly new. Despite its commitment to its signature brand of sprite-based fighters, even Capcom had taken the leap to polygons, from its debut 3D fighter *Star Gladiator* to even *Street Fighter* getting the *EX* treatment. But even with these new graphical changes, most 3D fighting games rarely utilised the 3D space. Apart from the odd side step, most would keep the action to a 2D plane, still confined in a ring. But the arrival of new hardware in the form of NAOMI – Sega's arcade board counterpart to the Dreamcast – was the perfect opportunity for new innovative ideas.

Enter *Power Stone*, a new breed of 3D fighting game from Capcom, with co-director Hideaki Itsuno having already cut his teeth on 3D fighters for the studio including *Star Gladiator* and *Rival Schools*. On the surface, the one-on-one fighter might have echoes of *Street Fighter*, notably the anime art illustrations for each character or the way you were fighting competitors from around the world depicted with larger-than-life stereotypes, albeit set in a romanticised steampunk 19th century. It was however a huge departure from the hardcore technical nature of fighting games where memorising complex input commands or timing your attacks were paramount. Instead, combat was a much simpler affair of stringing basic punches or kicks, with some movesets differing based on each

» [Dreamcast] In line with the comical art style, characters can be squished or flattened by the right attacks.

» [Dreamcast] British pilot/boxer Falcon actually went by the more amusing-sounding German name of Fokker in the Japanese release.

WHO'S WHO

THE WORLD WARRIORS FOR A NEW WORLD

WANG-TANG
A Chinese martial artist following his master's instructions to find the Power Stones, Wang-Tang is as optimistic as he is acrobatic, giving his off-the-wall attacks more flair. He basically turns Super-Saiyan when powered up – even one of his Power Fusions is much like a Spirit Bomb.

RYOMA
One of the only characters with his own weapon, giving him extra reach even if his katana doesn't instantly knock the stones out of an opponent. Carrying around a blade however means he's slower with picking up objects. When powered up he becomes an electro-charged silver samurai.

FALCON
A pilot in search of adventure, Falcon is the game's lead character. Fighting with a boxing style, his moves aren't flashy but he's a perfect all-rounder. When powered up he dons a metal suit able to fire rockets or charges at his opponents… like a rocket.

AYAME
Dancer by day, deadly ninja by night, Ayame's moves are a bit weak compared to her male counterparts but she makes up for it with speed. All the better for making a run for the Power Stones, which transform her into a pink ninja who fires off shurikens like cherry blossoms.

KRAKEN
This pirate has high offence and defence and his claw can transform during attacks. Although Kraken can't shoot his pistol, it does transform into a mini cannon when he's powered up into a ghost pirate who can unleash evil spirits to do his work.

VALGAS
The final boss, Valgas is a tough ex-soldier built like a brick who's both agile and hits so hard he can knock two Power Stones out of an opponent at once. He becomes a demon when powered up and can unleash devastating energy beams or screen-filling electrical blasts.

JACK
A sinister one-eyed thief wrapped like a mummy, Jack is as mysterious as he is unpredictable, moving around on all fours. A fast attacker, he gets sharper when powered up, able to unleash a wide-sweeping blade, a saw blade, as well as raining down plenty of energy swords.

GUNROCK
Gunrock is the largest fighter in the game, powerful enough to grab larger objects as weapons. This is offset by slower mobility, although that changes when he's powered up. As a stone golem, he can roll into opponents or crush them by dropping boulders all over the arena.

ROUGE
A fortune-teller with the graceful movement of a belly dancer while literally packing heat in her scorching fists. While also weak in strength and defence, she jumps high and can also outrun others. When powered up, she's an explosive genie who can trigger three Power Fusions.

GALUDA
This bounty hunter is on the search for a cure for his village and the woman he loves. Galuda's a heavyweight fighter who uses wrestling moves, including a body splash drop. With the Power Stones, he becomes a human totem pole, capable of firing energy arrows.

» [Dreamcast] Heavyweight characters are strong enough to grab pillars or poles and swing them at opponents for mega damage.

the final act of a play

» [Dreamcast] While the plot is kept to a minimum, each character has their reasons for searching for the Power Stone.

CONVERSION CAPERS

POWERED UP FOR THE HOME AND HANDHELD

DREAMCAST

NAOMI and Dreamcast sharing similar architecture meant an arcade-perfect port, though both versions releasing within the same month in Japan meant no room for extra modes. Nonetheless, you could unlock the boss characters as well as a few extra weapons, including an over-powered gatling gun. Three minigames were also playable on the Visual Memory Units.

PSP

Part of the *Power Stone Collection*, this handheld port included unlockable characters from the sequel and vice versa, as well as adjustments to the UI, such an improved radar for Power Stones in the arena. The lack of online play however was a missed opportunity for a game best experienced in multiplayer.

» [Dreamcast] Some Power Fusions require connecting a charge at your opponent. Whiff it however and you'll waste the power gauge.

» [Dreamcast] The challenger screen taking you around the globe certainly has an old *Street Fighter* vibe to it.

» [Dreamcast] While it's tempting to unleash a Power Fusion immediately, just using your powered up character's new attacks do the trick.

character, while the greater importance was on being aware of your environment, and using it to your advantage.

That's because *Power Stone* was a fully 3D fighting game viewed from an isometric perspective where you were free to move around an arena. Each stage was unique, from a bustling courtyard to an old western saloon to a Chinese restaurant stacked with huge ceramic jars of wine, each with its own layout and varying degrees of verticality. Best of all, you didn't have to rely solely on your own martial prowess because just about everything but the kitchen sink was at your disposal. If an object had a coloured ring around it when you approached it, you could pick it up and chuck it at your opponent. If you ran out of furniture or objects, you could still use the arena's walls by grabbing and jumping off them for other unique charging or grappling attacks. If that wasn't enough, treasure chests would also periodically spawn into the arena where you could pick up an even more destructive arsenal of both ranged and melee weapons. But their limited use also meant that each would also be quickly discarded to prevent anyone dominating with just one weapon. In that sense, there's much more of a brawler in the vein of *Streets Of Rage* in its DNA.

Where *Power Stone* stands out even more however is where it gets its title. Each competitor begins the round with a gem in their possession while another randomly spawns in the arena later. The fighter who could collect all three gems would transform into an all-powerful version of themselves, taking inspiration from the superhuman transformations seen in Japanese anime or Tokusatsu shows. For a limited time, you would have access to more powerful moves (again activated by a simple press of the punch or kick buttons) and be unsusceptible to getting knocked down. But by pressing either punch and jump or kick and jump, you could also use the rest of your power gauge to unleash a Power Fusion – the game's equivalent of a super move. Some of these require a charge up or actually charging into your opponent to trigger, but when they connect the damage is huge, if not enough to outright kill. In any case, you could always activate these fusions even with just a slither of the power gauge left. For those looking for a quick KO then, scrambling for Power Stones was a core meta of each round as you made a mad dash across the arena or tried to knock a Power Stone out from your opponent, which most attacks were capable of doing. As collecting Power Stones was considerably easier than having to build up a super meter like in other fighting games, it meant newcomers not familiar with the complexities of other fighters stood a chance of being able to feel powerful.

Having this kind of accessibility was a crucial design decision for Itsuno, as he explained in a 2019 *Guardian* interview. "One of my aims with *Power Stone* was to bring my experience to something that would be well received by players other than just hardcore fighting fans," he said. "Fighting games had become incredibly niche, and ordinary gamers were no longer able to keep up." That was even more important since *Power Stone* was designed to be both an arcade and console game from the get-go (albeit originally envisioned for the Matsushita M2 until that was cancelled and development moved to both NAOMI and Dreamcast), the latter having more opportunity

to open up to new players. This was also reflected in the development team, which was a mix of both arcade and console developers, as Itsuno "wanted a project that could bring the strengths of both sides – the arcade guys were great at making fighting games and the console guys were experts at creating 3D games".

Power Stone's vibrant colour and approachable fun made it stand out from 3D arcade fighters like *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* that still focused on realism and technical skill, while on the Dreamcast, it shone among other new innovative gems on Sega's console such as *Jet Set Radio* or fellow NAOMI alumnus *Crazy Taxi*. Yet time hasn't remembered it nearly as well as you might expect. Perhaps in the West where it was mostly experienced on the Dreamcast, it faced greater competition as a launch title as just one of many fighting games, including *Virtua Fighter 3tb* (PAL), *Mortal Kombat Gold* (US), *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing*, and the superior *Soulcalibur*. Moreover, it had a direct competitor with *Super Smash Bros*, which also traded on accessible party mayhem (albeit with up to four players), but also proved to offer greater depth that would please hardcore competitive players, not to mention starring a roster of classic Nintendo characters.

Capcom would double down on the multiplayer antics with the sequel expanding multiplayer to four players and even more varied stages but sadly, this bright new IP was short-lived, likely because in the long run its gameplay couldn't reach the same depth as its competitors. It's also hard to imagine its problematic character designs – from a Native American bounty hunter to a scantily-dressed magic carpet-riding fortune teller – making the cut in the unlikely event of a modern revival. That doesn't mean its influence hasn't been felt. Indeed, its colourfully exaggerated roster can be seen in *Overwatch*'s heroes, albeit with designs a bit more faithful to the nationalities they represent, while its improvised arena combat of randomised power-ups could be considered a blueprint for today's battle royale games. Meanwhile, Itsuno would later apply the technical skill of fighting games into 3D action games proper, as seen in the *Devil May Cry* series and action RPG *Dragon's Dogma*. You could say these games still glisten with the innovation first brought about in *Power Stone*.

» [Dreamcast] Play as Gunrock and you too can recreate that scene from *Indiana Jones*, except you're the boulder.

MASTER THE STONE

YOU'VE GOT THE STONES FOR THIS

GET THOSE STONES

■ The easiest way to gain an advantage is to get all three Power Stones, then unleash their power for maximum damage. Even without using an item or special manoeuvre, a simple flying kick is enough to knock one from an opponent. Be quick whenever another gem appears on the map.

PERFECT ESCAPE

■ While low on technical skill, you can nonetheless escape enemy attacks in a number of ways. Press the joystick away during an opponent attack and you'll perform a quick evade – jumping out of the way also counts as an escape. Press grab at the right time and you'll also cancel your opponent's grab.

BON APPETIT

■ If you've been knocked hard you can fortunately get your health back up thanks to the food items that regularly spawn in. An apple slice is a quick pick-me-up, a cake isn't bad, but a proper joint of meat goes a long way to refilling those bars. Just grab it before your opponent does.

» [Dreamcast] Each weapon has its pros and cons, but the flamethrower has both decent range and spread.

POWER HOUR

SEARCH FOR THE POWER STONES IN THE ANIME

■ If you thought the game was relatively light on plot, an anime adaptation actually tried to put a fun story together across 26 episodes. Produced by Studio Pierrot, whose output includes *Naruto* and *Bleach*, the anime focuses on lead character Edward Falcon whose father leaves him with one of seven Power Stones, prompting him to go on a search for the others – cue the perfect set-up for an epic quest encountering rivals and plenty of shenanigans. Most characters remain faithful to their game design, though Falcon clearly sounds American (or maybe he's Scottish, based on the change of emblem on his jacket), and he's also accompanied by a comic-relief butler. While the anime released in Japan the same year as the game, the English dub didn't materialise until 2003, and only on Canadian TV. Fortunately, those curious will find that the show can be viewed in its entirety on YouTube.

BOMB CONTROL

■ Bombs are one of many items you can use, and come in different sizes. They're also a bit finicky when throwing and don't always detonate. For the best impact, we recommend waiting for the timer to tick down to the last second before you throw it to guarantee it explodes on contact.

CATCH AND RELEASE

■ The most plentiful items at your disposal are in the environment such as furniture. It's easy to throw these at your opponent and vice versa. But did you know you can also catch what's thrown at you? Press grab just as an object is thrown towards you, then literally turn the tables.

COUNTER THE POWER

■ Don't panic if your opponent is powered up. While you'll want to keep your distance, you can actually still grab and throw them. If your opponent is charging up their Power Fusion, get in there for a throw and you'll not only cancel their attack but also cut down their power gauge.

NFL 2K

"FOOTBALL IS ONLY TWO THINGS – BLOCKING AND TACKLING"

» **Dreamcast** » **1999** » **Visual Concepts**

To be completely honest with you, I didn't care at all about *NFL 2K* when I bought it. I wasn't really into American football and the last videogame version I'd played was *Madden NFL 94* on the Mega Drive, but the seller threw the disc and manual in as a freebie with the copy of *NBA 2K* I actually wanted. At the time, I was running a Dreamcast website so any extra review fodder wasn't to be sniffed at, but I didn't see myself playing it much beyond that. Of course I am a spectacular fool, and had no idea that the game was excellent and had been very highly regarded by the US press.

It was a bit of a struggle to get used to it, as the way plays are selected with the analogue stick is a bit funky and I wasn't familiar with the rules beyond 'you've got four goes to move the ball ten yards'. Thankfully the game starts you out on Rookie difficulty, which lets you get into the fun of the game – big meaty dudes, fully decked out in body armour, smashing into each other like shoppers fighting over the last big TV on Black Friday. Boy, do they ever hit hard too. You'll see arms wrapped around heads, players dragged down by the ankles and even full body slams, and plenty of other similarly impactful tackles.

It was exactly that sense of brutality that made the game a hit with my friends, too. Playing together on the same team, we *eventually* figured out that you can't just clobber a receiver (that's called pass interference, folks) and managed to develop a respectable level of co-operation that allowed us to win games. We did have to pick the Broncos to do it though, and I was later informed by some American football-playing housemates that this was tantamount to cheating. Still, we had so much fun with it that I actually ended up spending way more time with *NFL 2K* than I ever did on *NBA 2K*, making it a powerful argument for giving every game a chance.

PLAY
FOOTBALL
78

THE MAKING OF X-MEN LEGENDS

BEFORE AN ULTIMATE ALLIANCE WAS FORMED AND PRIOR TO THE MCU'S INCEPTION, RAVEN SOFTWARE FORGED AHEAD WITH ITS OWN AMBITIOUS TAKE ON SUPERHEROES IN THE FORM OF X-MEN LEGENDS. MERGING MARVEL CHARACTERS WITH RPG MECHANICS? THE CREATORS TELL US HOW IT WAS DONE

WORDS BY AARON POTTER

The early Noughties marked a great time to be a Marvel comics fan. Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films were beginning to hit their stride, *Secret War* by Brian Michael Bendis was a major crossover storyline at the time, and the widely praised Nineties *X-Men* cartoon had continued to inspire a wide array of successful superhero shows going well into the next decade. Such impressive feats didn't go unnoticed by the videogame world, being enough to encourage many high-profile publishers to find new ways of translating everyone's favourite spandex-laden characters from page to screen. Superhero games had existed for years before, sure, yet it wouldn't be until September of 2004 that console players received their first taste of what one with role-playing mechanics mixed in could look like.

'*Final Fantasy* with X-Men' may have seemed like a daft concept to be floating around the Activision offices circa 2003, but it was exactly this idea that led the team at Raven Software to begin development on the now much-beloved action RPG, *X-Men Legends*. Previously a studio most known for its work on cult classic PC hits like *ShadowCaster*, *Hexen* and *NecroDome*, Raven soon found itself in a position where it was aching to break into the home console space. What better way to cement its dominance here than with a game based on one of comics' most popular super teams?

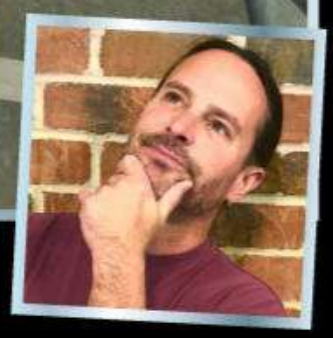
Marvel's *X-Men* was the perfect choice for a game based so heavily around team mechanics and swappable party members. And luckily for Activision and Raven Software, project lead Patrick Lipo had grown up quite the comic book aficionado. "I was pretty well-versed," he says with regards to all things superheroes. "During college in the early Nineties I happened to live only a few blocks from one of the best comics stores in the Midwest. During that time, two properties were absolutely everywhere: *Batman* and *X-Men*. Between mini-series and spin-offs it wasn't uncommon to see a half-dozen series of each selling in a given month... and I bought them all – even the goofy variant covers and the really terrible stuff." Patrick admits that he tended to gravitate more towards "norms" like Batman and "plain clothes heroes" like John Constantine. Those ragtag bunch of mutants, though, were a special exception. "For whatever reason *X-Men* became the super-powered stories I went all in on. It was an intoxicating time to be into comics because they were really breaking into popular consciousness."

Such a knowledge and appreciation for the source material placed Patrick in a good position to lead the way for a different style of superhero game based on the X-Men. The original plan, as already alluded to, was to have the action be turn-based, but it quickly became clear that only a more action-orientated combat system would do classic heroes like Wolverine, Cyclops and Colossus justice. This faster pace would also let the studio creatives play to their strengths.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** RAVEN SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **PLATFORM:** GAMECUBE, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX
- **GENRE:** ACTION RPG

» [GameCube] Raven took enemy variety very seriously. The best example is the New York flashback mission where you face sentinels.



» Bobby Duncanson was a mocap supervisor on *X-Men Legends*.

» Project lead Patrick Lipo was a big fan of comic books.

» Tom Odell was lead designer and faced numerous challenges.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

HERETIC
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1994

MAGESLAYER
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1997

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2000

» [GameCube] Swapping out members of your X-Men squad is as easy as finding an extraction point and choosing the desired replacement.

» [GameCube] You're able to unlock new superpowers and stat boosts for each hero the more they level up.

» [GameCube] From underground sewers to Alaskan satellite bases, environments in *X-Men Legends* offer a lot of variety.

This sudden realisation meant that Raven Software had a much bigger problem to solve. Namely, how do you create a superhero game with so many different power sets and keep everything balanced? It also didn't help that *X-Men Legends* was intended for a simultaneous multiplatform release across PlayStation 2, GameCube and Xbox, and a locked deadline was looming. The key to solving this came in designing levels that were open enough to accept all the diverse gameplay styles. Players could bring in any four-player squad of X-Men they wanted (out of a possible 15), after all, so it was important to accommodate any potential grouping.

Lead designer Tom Odell recalls this being one of the game's biggest development obstacles. "Just making sure that no matter which heroes the player put on their team or what character level and skills they had, [that] it would not break the level flow or progress of the mission," he posits. "We had to consider all the possible combinations of heroes and their powers, that a player could be using on every mission. Whether it was a flying-type hero, a powerful/strong-type hero, a teleporting-type hero and so on. We had to assume that any hero could be on any mission."

Being an IP that had been around in some shape or form since the early Sixties, various different characters had taken up the coveted mantle of 'X-Man' throughout the decades. True, it may have started out with a quaint line-up of just five involving Beast, Cyclops, Angel, Jean Grey and Iceman, but Raven Software felt pressure to live up to the '*Legends*' moniker it had laid out for itself. As such, the studio was careful to ensure its playable roster consisted of fan-favourite heroes that console audiences would easily recognise, as well as those with powers that lent themselves well to gameplay.

"We definitely took into consideration the popularity of the character and their abilities," Tom elaborates. "We wanted the player to be able to switch up and use different heroes on their team for the different missions, but at the same time also give them the ability to play as their favourite hero whenever they wanted to."

X-Men Legends did this by having all 15 of its playable characters fall into one of three unique fighting types, which could then also be used as a basis to inform their combat style, basic movement and starting stats.

Did any X-Man get cut during development? Project lead Patrick Lipo says no, though there's one member in particular he's disappointed he and the team couldn't quite crack. "We would have loved to put Kitty Pryde in as a playable character, but we didn't really know how we would do her abilities justice," he reveals. "In the end we started with core archetypes … some powers were pretty similar under the hood – damaging projectiles, radial blasts, fancy melee attacks – with their own special effects and animations."

X-Men Legends permitted players the fantasy of battling through stages however and with whomever they wanted.

THE LEGEND CONTINUES

GAMES THAT BUILT UPON RAVEN'S FIRST ISOMETRIC EFFORT

X-MEN LEGENDS 2

Rise Of The Apocalypse retained all the best hallmarks of the first *X-Men Legends*, expanding upon them with a larger superhero roster that included members of Magneto's Brotherhood of Mutants as well as the main X-Men team. Watching these sides work together only reinforced the sequel's co-operative central hook.

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Raven Software forwent a third game in favour of a spin-off series that would encompass the whole Marvel universe. The cel-shaded look was ditched in favour of a more realistic aesthetic, but the addition of characters like Black Panther, Doctor Doom and Silver Surfer made for some interesting power combinations.

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2

The first legacy title to not be developed by Raven, *Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2* was heavily inspired by Mark Millar's *Civil War* story arc from the comics. This forced players to side with either Iron Man or Captain America early on, adding extra weight to levels by locking off certain superheroes

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 3

Team Ninja's take on *Ultimate Alliance* returned the series to its classic comic book roots, delivering an appropriately campy adventure that perfectly suited the Nintendo Switch's co-operative tendencies. Passive buffs and stat improvements are more important than ever, though, as you equip your party of superheroes with collectible ISO-8 crystals.

N-GAGING X-MEN

HOW DID LEGENDS STACK UP ON NOKIA'S HANDHELD?

X-Men Legends was such a popular hit on consoles it eventually received a Nokia N-Gage version just five months later. This 'demake' of sorts (and its sequel) was developed by Texas-based studio Barking Lizards, who specialised in making licensed videogames specifically for phone and handheld devices. Purists can rest easy knowing it retains all the basic gameplay elements introduced by its big brother, including the ability to swap between multiple mutants on command, fully destructible environments and in-depth stat upgrades. The N-Gage version even manages to look somewhat like its console counterpart thanks to some beautiful pixel art, which helps keep each of the characters identifiable – even if they lack the same amount of detail.

Most of the console iteration's levels are faithfully recreated here, too, as is the story. It was a bold move to try and compress *X-Men Legends*' various pre-rendered cutscenes down to such a small screen, but Barking Lizards just about got it working as long as you don't mind some muffled audio. Where the N-Gage translation does fall down a little, however, is in its combat. While each mutant hero still has a catalogue of special skills they can equip and deploy when enough focus energy is built up, the number of basic attacks is reduced from two to just one. Unfortunately, this results in enemy bouts becoming a bit button mashy.

An odd choice is in how music only accompanies you whenever you enter fights. As such, most of the time it's just you and three other squad members roaming warehouses, city streets and of course the X-Mansion in absolute silence. *X-Men Legends* for N-Gage stacks up well against the game that inspired it overall though despite this, even if *Reign Of Apocalypse* on the Game Boy Advance remains the superior portable take on the X-Men.

» [GameCube] Having two characters perform a special attack simultaneously will engage a combo move, inspired by Colossus and Wolverine's 'Fastball Special'.

Wolverine
What was the Brotherhood doing at the HAARP facility?
You mentioned the Sentinels when we first saw you.
Do you know what happens to a toad when it's thrown out of a jet at 20,000ft?
What did Mystique want the location of?
Let's go. The Institute's brig should improve Toad's memory.

» [GameCube] *Legends* was mainly inspired by the comic books, but Raven also winks to Fox's movie series with the odd line.

Back
Alison
It's been two days now since I came to the Institute. I still haven't decided whether I want to stay or not, but Bobby Drake sure makes it seem awfully inviting.
continue...

» [GameCube] Alison acts as the conduit character for players, coming to terms with her fire-based powers shortly after the bombastic opening.

And while the game may start out simply enough with just the relatively melee-focussed Wolverine at your disposal, it isn't at all long until the frost-skating Iceman, teleporting Nightcrawler and more all join the roster. As well as making the levels as free form as possible so as to accommodate each hero's powers, Patrick cites another environmental factor as being crucial to nail, if Raven was to really sell people on this being the best *X-Men* game yet.

"The main thing that I wanted to push more than anything was environment destructibility," Patrick reveals. "My specific target experience, the one thing that I wanted to see as early in the project as possible was to be able to knock someone through a wall, have them continue flying backward, smack into a second wall and then slump to the ground." It was a vision Raven came to realise via the game's grab system, which meant that heroes could lift almost any object or enemy (relative to their strength level), thrown them in any direction, and watch the chaotic demolition ensue. It was yet another way to demonstrate the X-Men's immense power, in addition to each individual hero's unique abilities and combo manoeuvres. "The first time we got that working I ran around cheering."

By the time Raven Software had settled on having the game depict real-time action, almost in the style of a hack-and-slash, *X-Men Legends* ended up resembling something more like *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* or *Diablo*, rather than *Final Fantasy* as the initial pitch had visualised. It just so happened that the top-down, isometric view did a terrific job of keeping all four active X-Men on the screen at all times, truly adding to the scale of this bombastic original storyline penned by Raven's Robert Love alongside a team of former Marvel writers exclusively for the game.

The plot in *X-Men Legends* is appropriately epic, centring on a young new student Alison Crestmere (code name Magma) who has just started developing her mutant powers. Through

» [GameCube] Swapping out members of your X-Men squad is as easy as finding an extraction point and choosing the desired replacement.

Jean Grey
Professor X
Storm
Rogue
Iceman
Nightcrawler
Beast
Jubilee
Beast
Real Name: Dr. Henry McCoy
A living paradox, Henry McCoy has the body of a huge ape and the mind of a brilliant scientist. Extremely agile and strong, he earned the nickname 'The Beast' as a college football superstar. When contacted by Professor Xavier to join the newly formed X-Men, Hank gladly accepted and was given the
B Back
A Select
Scroll

» [GameCube] You can visit the X-Mansion in between story missions to read character bios, view cinematics and even play an *X-Men* trivia game.

» [GameCube] Sometimes a specific hero's power is key to moving forward. Where would the team be without a good old ice bridge?

» [GameCube] Despite the camera staying far away, plenty of the X-Men's iconic looks are recreated. Jubilee's jacket is gloriously yellow.

» [GameCube] Just like your team members, bosses can unleash superpowered manoeuvres. Toad's tongue lash will knock everybody back.

» [GameCube] All of the game's pre-rendered cinematics were completed in just four months. Most appear during crucial story moments.

» [GameCube] Flashback missions take place out of the main *Legends* storyline and sees the X-Men don their iconic Seventies costumes.

her players get to enjoy multiple globe-trotting missions, using a flexible squad of X-Men while attempting to thwart the efforts of Magneto's villainous Dark Brotherhood. Patrick reveals the narrative would have also involved an apocalyptic fourth act where an asteroid would hit New York had time permitted. In this scenario, the X-Men were forced to travel through time and fight against enhanced villains who styled themselves after Greek gods. "Cutting that content hurt us deeply," he admits, "but a few alternate costumes from that story made it in – some 'survival' outfits for characters like Cyclops and Storm."

It wasn't lost on Raven just how popular superhero movies were becoming as development on *X-Men Legends* entered full swing. Bryan Singer's 2000 *X-Men* movie was a critical and commercial hit, of course, and though this was a game that largely took inspiration from the comic books – and more specifically Mark Millar's *Ultimate X-Men*, to be exact – it didn't stop Patrick and his team from sprinkling in a bit of Hollywood cache by getting Patrick Stewart himself to reprise the role of Professor Xavier and adopting an early form of motion capture for the in-game cutscenes.

***X-Men Legends* may have felt like a premium product by the time it hit store shelves thanks to these inclusions, but mocap supervisor Bobby Duncanson recalls that it wasn't always a guarantee.** "The cutscenes from start to finish were done in three months with the help of Jarrod Showers [animator] and a couple of interns from our local Madison College," he explains. "Crazy times it was!" Character movements and conversation sequences were captured in such a short space of time, in fact, Bobby was eventually able to "memorise the dialogue of each scene because I heard it over and over again".

Tight timelines aside, all these different elements working in tandem is what caused *X-Men Legends* to chime so vigorously within players' hearts. Activision saw promise in Raven Software's experimentation, however, using this template as a basis for not just a sequel, but a whole other franchise involving the entire Marvel universe. It's a simple fact that without *X-Men Legends* there would be no *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*. Such a legacy makes sense considering the time, love and attention Raven Software put into this initial foundation.

With *X-Men Legends* Raven Software demonstrated a real affection for this universe like few other game developers rarely had. From the X-Mansion that you could fully explore between missions, a bevvy of hidden collectibles and unlockable costumes, to the suite of different abilities unique to each party member, this was the type of *X-Men* game long-time fans had been hoping for and Marvel's family of mutants deserved. As Tom Odell sums up, "We were designing and developing a type of game that was different than anything we had done before and were having a great time doing it." Legendary indeed.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

Info

- **System:** PC
- **Year:** 2018
- **Publisher:** Extremely OK Games
- **Developer:** Matt Makes Games
- **Key People:** Maddy Thorson, Noel Berry

Go Deeper

» There are hints in the game that the main character, Madeline, is a trans woman. This was later confirmed by developer Maddy Thorson.

» The game's mountain was named Celeste after the team googled British Columbian mountains and liked the name Mount Celeste.

» [PC] Rooms are often coated in spikes, leaving no room for error.

How a platforming masterpiece mixing hardcore challenge and a personal tale about mental health is able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the some of the greatest games in the genre

Words by Paul Walker-Emig

CELESTE

THE BACKGROUND

Matt Makes Games came to prominence as a studio for creating the closest thing to a 'killer-app' the ill-fated Ouya console ever had in the form of the 2013 release, *TowerFall*. Whispers about the multiplayer arena-battler's brilliance erupted into a chorus of praise as soon as it left the confines of the Ouya and made its way onto PC and PS4 as *TowerFall Ascension* in 2014, hailed as a leading light among a spate of indie games breathing new life into local-multiplayer gaming at the time. The game's perfectly precise mechanics suggested that this was a studio with the potential to create a spectacular platformer in the single-player space and so it proved to be with its next project.

Celeste began life as a game jam creation made in four days by Matt Makes Games' Maddy Thorson and Noel Berry for the Pico-8 – a virtual console that emulates the strict limitations of Eighties gaming hardware. Seeing potential in their rock-hard old-school creation where you have to platform up a mountain, the duo decided to expand the concept, working with the rest of their colleagues to create what would eventually become the critically acclaimed platforming masterpiece that is *Celeste*.

THE GAME

Celeste is a game about climbing a mountain. You take control of Madeline, who can run, jump and perform a mid-air dash in eight different directions. This limited palette of abilities has to be combined in intricate patterns that require perfect timing and precision to overcome elaborate platforming challenges composed of sharp spikes and deadly drops. You will die a lot, but quick restarts allow you to keep throwing yourself at a problem and refine your technique until you've mastered a section and can make your way out. It's a repeating loop and confronting and overcoming the seemingly-impossible gives you an intoxicating sense of god-like gaming skill borne out of incremental bouts of trial and error and the odd thrilling edge-of-the-seat moment of improvisation that sees you scrape through on quick reactions and a bit of luck.

As you'd expect from a mountain following videogame logic, things get harder as you progress towards the summit. This increase in complexity tests the skills you've built-up in a satisfying way, but *Celeste* doesn't just rely on that to keep you interested. New ideas are introduced, including

» [PC] *Celeste* deals with the issue of mental health with delicacy and understanding.

» [PC] Golden feathers transform into a flying ball that has to be guided carefully to safety.

» [PC] Madeline struggles to deal with confrontations with her shadow-self, Badeline.

» [PC] You can't hold on forever – Madeline's grip quickly gives out.

Things of note

SECRET STRAWBERRIES

You'll often spot, and sometimes find in hidden places, strawberries floating around the level. These offer an extra challenge for those who want it, testing your skills to see if you are able to grab them.

B-SIDES

Hidden collectible cassettes unlock harder B-side versions of levels. Beat them and you unlock an even harder C-Side.

TEST TIME

Set-piece boss-like sections are used effectively to ramp up tension and test the skills you've built up.

MOUNTAIN MELODIES

Celeste received a number of award nominations for its fantastic soundtrack, composed by Lena Raine.

SPEED CLIMBING

Celeste became a huge hit in the speedrunning community, which helped contribute to the game's profile and success.

platforms that change position every time you dash, boss-like encounters and diamonds that recharge your mid-air dash when you hit them, creating the potential for sections where you are essentially flying through the air, never touching the ground.

As tricky as these additions can make the game, it always works, thanks to pixel-perfect platforming and flawless controls that ensure that mistakes always feel like they are your own fault. And if it is too hard for you, *Celeste* also deserves to be credited for its fantastic difficulty system. Rather than having a binary choice between the rock-hard standard difficulty and an Easy mode, *Celeste* lets you tweak a number of assists. You can change how much stamina you have for climbing, change the speed of the game, or give yourself more air dashes. It's a fantastically flexible system that allows the game to be accessible to all ability levels without undermining its hardcore nature.

We've dealt with the literal part of climbing the mountain, but there's also a metaphorical one. *Celeste* is a game about struggles with mental health, which deeply effects protagonist Madeline. Her plight to climb the mountain, her conflict with a shadow-version of herself called Badeline and the interactions she has with characters she meets on the way tell us a story about anxiety, how it impacts Madeline's life and how she deals with it. Madeline is well-written and likeable, story beats are well-paced, and, perhaps most importantly, Madeline's growth and experiences are brilliantly tied into what you are doing in the game. In other words, it's not that *Celeste* tacks a personal tale about an important mental health issue on top of a fantastic platform game. Rather, those two components are inherently interrelated, woven together in such a way that they echo and enhance each other to the game's benefit.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Breaking into the canon of all-time great platformers is no easy feat, especially when the likes of the *Mario* games from the NES and SNES era – from which the early *Celeste* drew some of its inspiration – set such a high benchmark so early on. *Celeste* is a platformer of such high quality that, with the bare bones of jumping and a dash, it manages to do just that.

Get that core right – the platforming – and we already know, courtesy of the aforementioned *Mario* series, just how well the immortal 2D platformer ages. Just as the brilliance of those 30-year-old games continues to shine today, so will *Celeste*'s in the future. Every time we return to it we will be reminded of the high quality that permeates every aspect of the game – it's pixel art, an incredible soundtrack, pacing, level design, well-considered difficulty settings, storytelling and, of course, that pixel-perfect platforming. It's one of the best ever made and will retain that status for a long time to come.

> “I had Tesla coils with a thousand volts going through them in my lab!”
> David Thiel

DAVID THIEL

From Q*bert's cussing to the roar of the crowd in Winter Games, David Thiel's long career in the videogame and pinball business has seldom been off key

Words by Paul Drury

If you've ever wondered what qualifications people needed to break into the early videogame industry, David Thiel has an interesting answer. "I started off as a pipe organ major and after one year, decided that was the road to madness," he says, without a hint of a cackle. "It was such a solitary pursuit. I switched to technical theatre and can design sets, do lights… and I've never used any of it since." His skills as a coder and a musician were vital for getting his first role in the industry at Gottlieb, though, and soon he was creating audio for all the company's coin-ops, including *Mad Planets* and the all-conquering *Q*bert*. He moved into the home computer and console market in the mid-Eighties, cofounding Incredible Technologies, and has worked on almost 30 pinball machines, producing unique sound and music for such marvellous tables as *The Hobbit*, *Avatar* and *Pirates Of The Caribbean*.

David, are you the guy that taught Q*bert to swear?
Yes, I'm that guy! It did have a lot to do with swearing, actually. I'd not done any game audio and that's not why I was hired. I was a programmer and delighted to be working on 8-bit computers because my background was in mainframes and that could be very frustrating. I'd got an Apple II and could see the potential and I really liked videogames. After graduating from college in 1972, I spent the next seven years playing keyboards in bands and between sets, I'd play some of those early arcade games they had in the venues.

Any bands we might have heard of?
Check out Chewawa Allstar on YouTube [We did and they rock – Ed]. We played the Chicago circuit through the Seventies, six nights a week, earning our chops, until disco hit and ended all that. I got a job selling synthesisers in a store which was also the first Apple dealership in Chicago, so at the back of the shop, we had Apple IIs and that's where I learned to program. That got me a job at an insurance company and from there I got the gig at Gottlieb.

» David (bottom right) played keyboards in Chewawa Allstar before his videogame career began. You'll find them on YouTube in their mid-Seventies pomp.

Gottlieb was only just setting up a videogames division when you joined in 1982, having been a leader in the pinball industry since the Thirties.
Yeah, but in the early Eighties, because of the rise of coin-op videogames, you couldn't give a pinball machine away, certainly in America. The management at Columbia, who now owned Gottlieb, said they needed to get into videogames. Gottlieb didn't want to because they thought it was a passing thing!

How did you end up handling the audio for the company's new videogames' division?
I put my hand up! I was creating graphics utilities because otherwise the artists were using grid paper and coloured pencils… and when management realised they needed sound for their first in-house game, *Reactor*, I just raised my hand and said 'I can do that! Just give me the hardware'. I became the sound guy… for all the in-house projects.

***Reactor* was designed and coded by the legendary Tim Skelly, who had made his name at Cinematronics with such games as *Rip-Off* and *Warrior*.**
Tim was a rock and roll guy and that was my world, too. I thought our audience of 11-year-old boys didn't want to hear the sounds of *Pac-Man*, all that 8-bit music. Sure, they learned to love it, but it was kind of like Stockholm syndrome. I wanted to make music and sounds for games that was much more their native language. But you see, there's virtually no sound hardware on that board – you have to do everything in software. Every sound you hear is an algorithm! I wrote some crazy algorithms and if you listen to *Reactor*, it's rocking! There's a bass drum and bassline and it sounds nasty.

The game also has speech, which was still quite a novelty back then.
We used a board created for a pinball machine and rather than going down the sampling route, which would take up a lot of memory, [the technology] used a synthesiser, the Votrax chip, which allowed you to talk a lot more – albeit, badly. Which would be cool if you only ever did robot games.

» Tim Skelly, creator of *Reactor*, included David in one of his cartoons which appeared in Skelly's collection, *Shoot The Robot, Then Shoot Mom*.

> "Gottlieb were really being dicks with their employees. I was paid a low-level engineer's salary when Q*bert had made them millions"
> David Thiel

» [C64] *Winter Games*: there's no business like snow business…

Was it quite difficult to get it to say anything intelligible?
I was having a really hard time getting it to say simple things. Just the words 'bonus points' sounded like 'bogus points'. That chip was made by a company called Federal Screw Works and the irony has never been lost on me. After days trying to get it to work, I thought 'What the hell – what if I just put random numbers into the chip?' And it sounded cool! This was clearly the finest use of this technology. And that got used in *Q*bert*.

Ah, you swearing at the technology led to Q*bert swearing on-screen!
Yup, Q*bert's voice came out of frustration during my work on Reactor. I saw Q*bert bouncing around on this pyramid and said to Warren [Davis – programmer and co-designer] 'Have I got something for you! This will be great for this game!' I told him I had a pitch control so for the other characters, we can make really low sounds or high-pitched squeaky sounds… I knew we could use all these unique voices as gameplay cues, so when you hear this sound, you know a bad guy is about to appear. That's more than decoration – that's a functional cue.

Sound is often underrated in games, especially back then. Did you feel you were advocating for its importance?
That's been my quest for my entire career. We were developing a new medium and I was lucky enough to have been there in the beginning, helping to develop the vocabulary of this new form of entertainment and engagement. It was different because it was interactive. Now, books are interactive as you have to create things in your mind from the words on the page… but it's linear – the book isn't going to change. This new medium was interactive and so we were exploring what was fun about that. What do people want to do, to see, to hear? I've spent my whole career exploring that: how to code non-verbal information in the audio space.

Did you explain to the programmers your approach to sound design as integral to the player experience?
Typically I'd keep the deep theory to myself [laughs]. I would explain why I needed them to call each particular sound because they had meaning for the player. It would need a bit more work from the programmer, like 'If an enemy comes in from the left, call this sound, but if it's from the right, call this one… or when the player has done something four times, call this sound so he knows he's achieved something'.

And the sound when Q*bert falls off the cube is just funny.
Oh I'd try to get humour in wherever possible. It's hard with anything interactive because something that's funny the first time, gets old fast. If Q*bert said a phrase every time he fell, you'd be done with it after the fourth time but a non-speech thing… and there's that kinaesthetic element, too. Rick Tighe put a pinball flipper in the cabinet which makes a thwack when Q*bert hits the bottom. You can really feel it! I was brought up on Warner Brothers cartoons and that is pure Wile E Coyote.

You also worked on *Mad Planets*, which has a rocking musical score and lots of sound effects playing. How many sound channels are you using there?
[Grins broadly] Ah, here's something else about how humans parse audio which you can leverage. I figured this out when playing *Robotron*… if you'd been playing for three minutes and were all sweaty and someone asked you how many sounds you thought were playing simultaneously [in the game], you'd definitely answer four of five. But no, *Robotron* only ever plays one sound at a time. In *Mad Planets*, there's a beat in the background, then there's an explosion, and then the beat carries on. Your mind thinks 'Oh the explosion was very loud,' not, 'Hey where did the music go?' Your mind thinks continuous sounds are masked by louder sounds.

FIVE TO PLAY

David picks the soundtrack to his gaming life

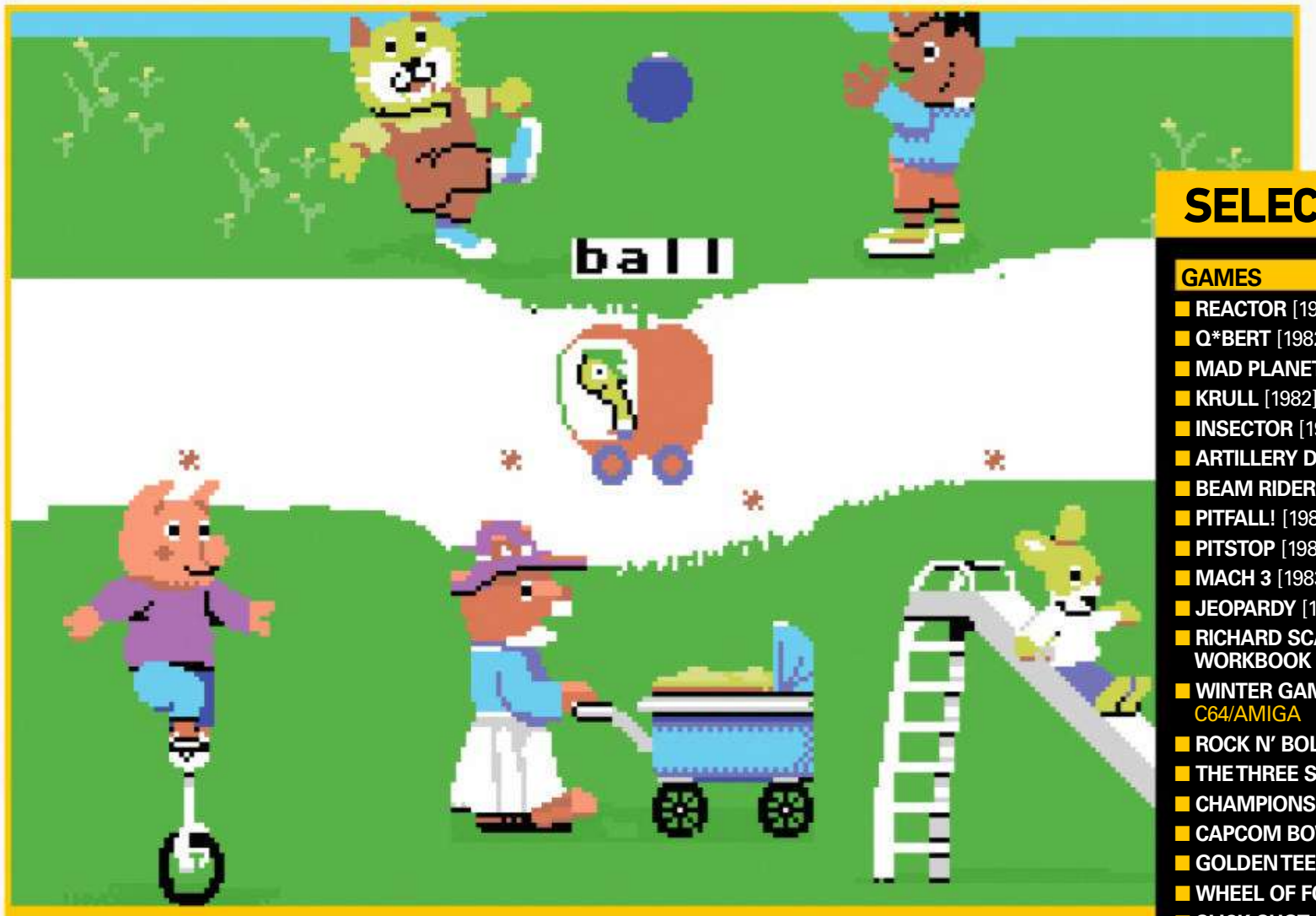
REACTOR
■ Tim Skelly, the creator of such glorious vector titles as *Warrior* and *Star Castle*, came to Gottlieb on a three-game deal. *Reactor* was his only released title, with David providing a rocking soundtrack to this innovative and highly original coin-op.

Q*BERT
■ David's best-known game is an excellent example of the importance of audio to the player experience. The sound of *Q*bert* jumping across the pyramid and his infamous profanities when he dies are as iconic as his elongated nose.

MAD PLANETS
■ 'Forgotten gem' is an overused term but is wholly apt for this brilliant blaster. Designed by the late Kan Yabumoto and with graphics by Jeff Lee, David produced a banging score, perfectly complimenting the frenetic action on-screen.

WINTER GAMES
■ After leaving the arcade industry behind, David was part of the team behind this hugely popular sports title. From the tension of ski jumping to the elegance of figure skating, this multi-event collection was another gold medal winner from Epyx.

FAMILY GUY
■ David has worked on many great pinball tables over the years, from *AC/DC* to *Avatar*, but we have a very soft spot for this witty and varied table based on the best animated TV show ever (sorry, Homer). Stewie's mini-table is just adorable.



» [Adam] *Richard Scarry's Best Electronic Workbook Ever* pre-dated the CD-ROM approach to interactive edutainment. How we miss that.

How do you go about creating a good blast sound?
Your audience has never been near a real laser blast, but they've seen *Star Wars*, so I used the same reference points as they did. Hollywood led the charge on this! Very few people have been next to a gun when it's fired and guns in a Hollywood movie do not sound like guns in the real world. People have heard gunshots in hundreds of movies and on TV – those are all the creation of some clever sound engineer who is going for an emotional effect.

Did you have a library of sounds you could draw from?
For a long time, Blockbuster video store was my reference library [laughs]. If I thought I needed a certain sound, I'd rent a film which I thought might have it in, listen to it and then write an algorithm to try and replicate [that sound].

So you weren't punching a melon in a Foley studio to get a good splat sound, then?
No, it was all done in software. Chris Brewer, who would go on to design *MACH 3*, liked to play with 'big electricity' – Tesla coils with a thousand volts going through them. He made them with giant transformers and coat hanger wire. He brought them to my lab and that inspired the sounds in *Reactor*.

It sounds like Dr Frankenstein's lab. When you worked on an actual film licence, *Krull*, was the process different because you had assets from the movie?
We were owned by Columbia Pictures, who were producing the film, and we were doing the game while it was in production. We had pictures, the script and the music by James Horner, which I couldn't use in the end. The game is not so abstract – it's Prince Colwyn running around a swamp, so I wanted the sound of you putting your foot into a swamp and then pulling it out. How do you do that in an algorithm? I wrote tiny little loops [of code] for a week and finally I got something evocative of feet going in and out of mud. That week was intense.

We like the low rumble of the rocks you have to dodge on the first level of *Krull*.
That began with an algorithm I'd seen at Eugene Jarvis and Larry de Mar's [the co-creators of *Defender* and *Robotron*] studio when they'd set up Vid Kidz. They invited me over one evening because they said they admired my work on *Reactor* and they wanted to talk about working together. They had an oscilloscope and you know that great explosion at the end of *Defender*, like the world is ending? They played that and I looked at the wave pattern on the screen and thought 'Oh, that's how you do it! Of course!' I didn't copy it but I could see the technique they were using… it's a triangle wave but the trick is, the slope is based on a random number, so it's going to be all over the place. That gives it that chaotic, explosive quality. The rumble of those rocks in *Krull* and the explosions in *Mad Planets* and *MACH 3*, they are all my enhancement of that fundamental notion of how you do it.

You mention *MACH 3*, which was of course a laserdisc game. Did creating audio for that format require a different approach?
Here's a tragic story that only people who know the SID chip will understand.

You have the right audience here at Retro Gamer!

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **REACTOR** [1981] ARCADE
- **Q*BERT** [1982] ARCADE
- **MAD PLANETS** [1982] ARCADE
- **KRULL** [1982] ARCADE
- **INSECTOR** [1982 – UNRELEASED] ARCADE
- **ARTILLERY DUEL** [1983] ATARI 2600
- **BEAM RIDER** [1983] C64/COLECOVISION/ATARI 800
- **PITFALL!** [1983] C64/COLECOVISION/ATARI 800
- **PITSTOP** [1983] VARIOUS
- **MACH 3** [1983] ARCADE
- **JEOPARDY** [1984] C64/ADAM
- **RICHARD SCARRY'S BEST ELECTRONIC WORKBOOK EVER** [1984] ADAM/C64
- **WINTER GAMES** [1984] C64/AMIGA
- **ROCK N' BOLT** [1984] C64/COLECOVISION
- **THE THREE STOOGES** [1986] AMIGA
- **CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING** [1986] C64
- **CAPCOM BOWLING** [1988] ARCADE
- **GOLDEN TEE GOLD** [1989] ARCADE
- **WHEEL OF FORTUNE** [1989] ARCADE
- **SLICK SHOT** [1989] ARCADE
- **DYNO BOP** [1990] ARCADE
- **BATTLE TECH** [1991] VR INSTALLATION
- **TIME KILLERS** [1992] ARCADE
- **ANGRY ROBOT: ATTACK OF THE TITAN** [2014] MOBILE
- **TREASURE TOMBS** [2015] MOBILE

PINBALL

- **Q*BERT'S QUEST** [1983]
- **LASER WAR** [1987]
- **SECRET SERVICE** [1988]
- **TORPEDO ALLEY** [1988]
- **TIME MACHINE** [1989]
- **MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL** [1989]
- **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN** [2006 – DATA EAST PINBALL]
- **FAMILY GUY** [2007]
- **SPIDER-MAN** [2007]
- **INDIANA JONES** [2008]
- **WHEEL OF FORTUNE** [2008]
- **NBA** [2009]
- **CSI** [2009]
- **IRON MAN** [2010]
- **AVATAR** [2010]
- **TRON** [2011]
- **THE ROLLING STONES** [2011]
- **TRANSFORMERS** [2011]
- **THE AVENGERS** [2012]
- **AC/DC** [2012]
- **X-MEN** [2012]
- **STAR TREK** [2013]
- **MUSTANG** [2014]
- **THE HOBBIT** [2016]
- **ALIEN** [2016]
- **DIALLED IN** [2016]
- **LEXY LIGHTSPEED ESCAPE FROM EARTH** [2017]
- **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN** [2017 – JERSEY JACK PINBALL]
- **RETRO ATOMIC ZOMBIE ADVENTURELAND** [2021]

I had finished *Krull* and management said I could design a new sound board [for their coin-op games]. Commodore gave me engineering samples and I was going to put two SID chips, with really good capacitors and really good filters, something they didn't do on the C64, plus another processor on this board. It would have six channels of sound plus a TI chip for speech. I had a C64 at home so I knew what the SID could do and that's why I wanted it – it was wildly better than anything else on the market. I had a wire wrap prototype made up and I knew we had something that would blow everyone else away. I was ecstatic! Then a white-shirted guy from purchasing showed up and said Commodore had decided they needed all the SID chips they were producing for their own products. I was crestfallen. That was my worst day at Gottlieb.

Was this one of the reasons why you left Gottlieb in 1983?
Gottlieb were really being dicks with their employees, like when *Video Games* magazine came to do a feature on *Q*bert*, we weren't allowed to use our real names. I was J Walkman. If you're creating something, you wanna say 'Hey mom, look what I did!' and they were cutting that off. Plus I was working six days a week, supporting all the game projects, working like crazy and being paid a low level engineer's salary when *Q*bert* had made them millions. Also, I could see the coin-op industry was in trouble. Games weren't being made and there were all these problems with laserdisc [technology].

> "The SID chip in the C64 was great! It's the moral equivalent of three mini Moogs"
> David Thiel

You joined Action Graphics as an 'aesthetic engineer'. Erm, did you come up with that job title?
Yes, I did. I was a programmer but I was dealing with aesthetics – they thought I was nuts but let me do it.

You work on conversions of such games as *Beam Rider*, *Pitfall!* and *Pitstop* for various machines, including the C64, ColecoVision and Atari 2600. In terms of creating audio, did each machine require a different approach?
[laughs] They're all like snowflakes – every one is different. I mean, they all have a sound chip, which is usually three or four channels and there's a register and you can make it play ––a tone… but you have to play with pitch in insane ways!

Did you enjoy working on the famous SID chip?
It was great! I mean, it's the moral equivalent of three mini Moogs. It's an extremely powerful thing and the guy who designed it [Bob Yannes] was a unique individual. Very few digital engineers know about analogue but this was his passion and people are still using it today to make music.

You are one of the few people we have spoken to who worked on Coleco's short-lived Adam computer.
At the time, we didn't know it was going to fail as spectacularly as it did [laughs]. It was the first multimedia machine and the game I worked on, *Richard Scarry's Best Electronic Workbook*, is really the precursor to CD-ROM titles. The Adam had a computer-controlled tape drive so you had access to big data and it even had this daisywheel printer, so you could, for example, store all your recipes and print them out, as well as having all these ColecoVision games and new games that leveraged this big storage. It was sounding like the ultimate home computer!

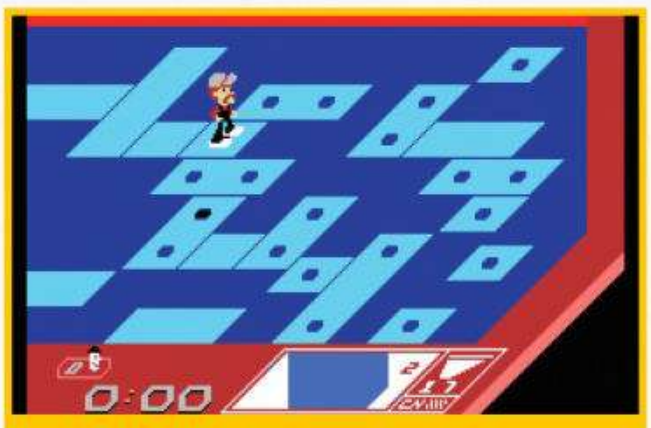
When Action Graphics folded, you set up a new company, Free Radical Software, with Richard and Elaine Ditton. Was that a risky venture for you?
It was a huge risk. We estimated we had about 90 days' work to do on the project we were working on, *Winter Games*, when Action Graphics went down and the three of us looked at each other and said, 'We can just stop now and never see our back pay or we can finish this game.' We thought it was going to be a pretty good game so we spent the next three months working on it at home and it turned out to be a big hit for Epyx on the C64. Richard, Elaine and I were all in debt and had no investors but we still decided to form a company because we knew Epyx wanted to port it to everything… and we knew all the platforms!

So the company was built on the success of *Winter Games*.
I personally coded the Atari ST version, Richard did the Amiga one, Elaine worked on the PC release, there was a Mac release… it was ported to anything that wasn't nailed down. The money from that helped us pay our mortgages through that time and then pinball loomed large. Richard had always wanted to write a pinball operating system and Gary Stern's new venture, Data East Pinball, needed one… that contract allowed us to move out of our bedrooms into 10,000 square feet in Arlington. The landlord refused to put the name and Free Radical Software on the sign outside so we changed our name to Incredible Technologies.

You worked on several pinball tables for Data East, including *Secret Service* and *Time Machine*. Were you happy to be back in the coin-op business?
You have a lot more resources than for home games and you kind of 'own' those resources. You make a sound and put in on [the board]. You're the master of your own domain! It's not like you're making sounds on the C64 and the programmer sees you as eating his resources. I got to design the sound board for Data East and configured it to be the first stereo board for a pinball machine. That was great.

CHAIN REACTOR

"A certain kind of player really liked it," explains David of *Reactor*, the first game Tim Skelly designed for Gottlieb. "To play it successfully, you had to be sneaky and stealthy. There's tons of subtlety and the engineers at Gottlieb and I thought it was the greatest game ever… but teenage boys wanna storm in and punch something." The game, for all its beauty and originality, was not a hit in the arcades but surprisingly was ported to home consoles through a publishing deal with Parker Brothers. "It even had a TV advert which featured my music," grins David. "I'd spent the last decade playing in bands, recording and touring, and after a year at Gottlieb, my music is on television! I knew I'd made the right decision getting into videogames."



» [ColecoVision] *Rock N' Bolt* was a clever little puzzle game David worked on during his short time at Action Graphics.

» [Atari 2600] *Artillery Duel*: David managed to coax decent sound effects from even the most humble of sound chips.

» [Amiga] *The Three Stooges* was one of many fine releases from Incredible Technologies, the company David cofounded.

» [Arcade] *MACH 3* was Gottlieb's first venture into the doomed laserdisc format.

» [Arcade] *Krull* was based on the film of the same name and was actually better, which may be damning it with faint praise.

» [Atari 800] *Pitstop*: careful with that nozzle…

» Arcade] *Insector*: an unreleased game from Tim Skelly with David providing the audio – it now exists on MAME.

In the Nineties, you join Microsoft and end up sharing the stage with Bill Gates at the CES in 1995 – as a parrot.

They relocated me 1,700 miles for that [laughs]. Microsoft had hired Tim Skelly and they got to the point in their project where they needed sound and he said 'I know a guy…' They'd been working on this anthropomorphised user interface… some of their Stanford guys had done research and come to the conclusion people would have a better experience with a computer if they were dealing with a character. That's probably true but the ability to provide that even in 2021 isn't really there. That's why Siri and Alexa don't have a visual element. Tim had been working on this character Peedy the Parrot and we had this Silicon Graphics workstation and another computer doing the voice recognition. It had a decent vocabulary it could understand but in terms of speech, they went with synthesis and frankly the best synthesiser you could buy in the mid-Nineties didn't sound much better than the Votrax one I used in the Gottlieb days.

What did you do?

They had taken all this trouble to make a beautifully animated parrot and his voice sounded terrible. I couldn't code some brilliant text to voice software in eight weeks, so I pre-recorded all the voice clips they needed for this CD changer they wanted to demo. Hey, I can do a parrot! [does impressive impression of Captain Flint from *Treasure Island*] I did that for weeks… and if we ever needed new vocabulary, I was there to do it!

In the new millennium, you returned to pinball and have worked on almost 30 tables. Have you a favourite?

Family Guy I like. My wife is very tolerant of my work and she'd choose that one. We got Seth [MacFarlane – creator of the series] in a recording booth and he did a huge amount of voices for that machine. My favourite, though, is actually a British game, *Alien*. It's from Heighway Pinball and though the guy behind that company couldn't manage a one-car funeral, he hired some really good people from the USA. I was one of them and the game turned out really well. Only 200 were built… and I've got one! It's the only machine I own and my wife provides the voice of Mother.

So if you had to choose: joysticks or flippers?

[Thinks for a while] I like doing videogames but if I got a job in the industry now, I'd spend six months just doing gun sounds, so at this point in time, it's flippers. I'm currently working on four pinball tables for three different manufacturers and they should all be out this year. I'm doing more work now than I've ever done in my long career!

Thanks to Martyn Carroll for his help with this article.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

MERMAN: What sort of sound driver did you use on the C64?

Something I wrote myself. I was working on a game called *Rock N' Bolt* and the programmer wanted music while you were playing and that's hard with only three voices. Something's gotta give. My custom driver which sat on top of the SID chip did a clever thing – I ran six channels of sound through a three channel device. If a sound effect had to happen, it 'stole' that channel but in such a way that the other channel was still running but just not touching the hardware, so when the sound effect is done, the music picks up where it would've been and you just think you didn't hear it because the sound effect was so loud!

NORTHWAY: Did you have tools on the C64 that would analyse real sounds and generate similar synthetic sound effects?

No! It was all my brain thinking 'How can I torture SID to produce a sound that reminds me of, say, the crowd applauding?' It was all clever pitch modulations and filters to get you in that ballpark.

TT: Were you any good at the arcade games you worked on?

I was pretty good at *Reactor* but not so good at *Q*bert*. We did have a game room at Gottlieb with our competitors' games in as well as ours. When I was in the mid-afternoon doldrums and I needed a stimulant, I'd go in there and play *Robotron*, *Centipede* and *Missile Command*. Those were my three. I could get pretty deep into *Robotron*. I didn't drink coffee and if *Robotron* can't get your adrenal gland going, nothing will.

Karma 97170

Combo 0

Kill 0

Time 1.23

Ninja Gaiden Black

TEAM NINJA'S GAME REVEALS MY TRUE SKILL

» XBOX » 2005 » TEAM NINJA

I loved Microsoft's original Xbox and it remains one of my favourite systems. I genuinely feel that it was the last console to come out that was significantly more powerful than the available PCs of the time and I can't see that changing in the immediate future.

Power wasn't the only reason I preferred the Xbox to the PS2 and the GameCube at the time of release, though. All three consoles are great at what they do, but it was the exclusives on Microsoft's system that really drew me in, exclusives like Sega's *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, Bungie's *Halo: Combat Evolved* and Team Ninja's *Dead Or Alive 3*.

Microsoft's signing of Team Ninja during this period seemed like a particularly sound decision as the studio could seemingly do no wrong on Microsoft's powerful hardware. Granted, the titillating nature of *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* hit something of a bum note on its release, but the rest of its games on Microsoft's machine were top tier, and *Ninja Gaiden* is arguably the best of them.

Team Ninja's games always looked outrageously good on Microsoft's console and *Ninja Gaiden* was no exception. It remains graphically astonishing today and now looks even better on the Series X with an increased resolution and HDR enabled. Running at a lightning fast 60 frames per second, it's a deliciously hectic game that boasts some excellent visual effects and huge imposing bosses, including a tough as nails bone dragon.

Team Ninja's game is as tough as it is beautiful and if one criticism can be levelled at it (aside from its occasionally chaotic camera) it's that some of its sections and bosses can feel a little too difficult at times. You'll stick with it though because the combat mechanics are so precise and well-crafted, and it feels so satisfying when you finally do topple an unforgiving opponent.

Fortunately, Team Ninja was well aware of its game's notorious difficulty setting and released an updated version of the game in 2005 called *Ninja Gaiden Black*. Even though it actually made the game even more challenging, it also added a lower 'Ninja Dog' difficulty setting if you died more than three times on the first level. Needless to say that's what I unlocked whilst taking this screenshot. My reactions have clearly dulled since 2005. I wonder how I'll fair with Tecmo's incoming Switch trilogy?

>> This month we check out two new Evercade cartridges, discover how Pac-Man fares as a battle royale game and find out if RetroMania Wrestling is worthy of your cash

»[Evercade] Games like *Operation Logic Bomb* are a great reason to support the Evercade. We love finding curios like this.

Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

SHOULD YOU SEEK OUT THE FIRST NEW EVERCADE COLLECTIONS OF 2021?

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT** EVERCADE
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £14.99
- **PUBLISHER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS
- **PLAYERS:** 1

Blaze Entertainment hasn't released any new Evercade cartridges since December 2020, so these new carts are very welcome. The new compilations are *Jaleco Collection 1* (ten games) and *Piko Interactive Collection 2* (13 games), which should keep you going until the next carts arrive. As with previous Evercade carts, each release costs £14.99, which is tremendously good value. Before we examine the titles across each individual collection, we'll take a look at everything the carts share in common.

Emulation is up first and the two carts cover a good range of systems between them. *Jaleco Collection 1* features a selection of NES and SNES games, while Piko's cart is a little more ambitious and also features emulators for the Mega Drive, PlayStation and Game Boy Advance – two 32-bit systems that haven't featured in the Evercade range before. As with previous compilations the emulation across all systems is very solid, although *Football Madness* isn't really a good test of the capabilities of the PlayStation emulator. *Racing Fever*, the lone GBA release, appears to run very well and it's pleasing to see more systems being added, as it ultimately leads to more games, which is always a good thing. We'd still like to see more resolution options, a sharper output and a 'pixel perfect' option to avoid shimmer, but at least we know most are being planned for later in the year.

In terms of presentation, both carts look identical to earlier packs, with the same packaging and manual designs. One new inclusion is that *Jaleco Collection 1* features a double-sided poster, while Piko's pack adds a sticker sheet. They're nothing major, but it's still nice to have when so many companies are ditching physical extras. In terms of menus and options they all follow the layout of earlier carts so everything is easy to find.

Interestingly the available Mega Drive games feature a handy button mapping option, but this is absent for other games. It makes *Racing Fever* initially confusing to play because the on-screen prompts point to using the A button to progress, but you actually need to use B. This is admittedly pointed out in the manual and a side effect of the Evercade emulating many different systems, but individual

BRIEF HISTORY

» The Evercade was released in early 2020 and immediately impressed us thanks to its solid design and strong collection of curated carts. Several new cartridges have been released since its initial launch and numerous more are on the way. Blaze has also revealed a new home version of the Evercade called Evercade VS, which will be available this November. It promises to be more powerful than the handheld and will let you play multiplayer games.

»[Evercade] It's ironic that the best football game is found on *Jaleco Collection 1* and not Piko's sports-themed cartridge.

PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Monster Hunter Rise

I've been playing Capcom's monster slaying series since discovering it on the PSP and this new handheld version is great fun.

NICK

RetroMania Wrestling

I never knew I needed The Road Warriors facing off against the Blue World Order until I got it.

»[Evercade] *Brawl Brothers* is a great brawler. We imagine it's sequel, *The Peace Keepers* will be included in the next Jaleco collection.

customisation of keys would help remedy this issue going forward.

We'll now take a look at the two individual collections and see how they compare. *Jaleco Collection 1* is up first and has a solid selection of games with very few duffers. By far the best of the bunch is *Operation Logic Bomb*, a great top-down SNES shooter that requires you to clear out large areas and features some great boss fights. *The Ignition Factor* is another interesting offering that has you exploring flaming buildings as a firefighter. Like *Logic Bomb* it's not the most well-known of titles, so it's a nice gem to discover. *Rival Turf* and its sequel, *Brawl Brothers*, are up next and both are enjoyable brawlers with the latter getting most of our attention thanks to a better range of characters and entertaining combat moves.

Two sports games are also included: *Bases Loaded* and *Super Goal! 2*. The former is an OK NES baseball

»[Evercade] *Summer Challenge* has some good varied events and it's possible to play with friends, providing you don't mind taking turns.

»[Evercade] We really enjoyed *Racing Fever*. Here's hoping more GBA games appear in the future.

release, while the latter is a fun arcade football game with some snazzy Mode 7 effects. *Earth Defence Force* is an average shooter that's elevated by its weapon load-ups and innovative shield system. Then there's *Astyanax*, a NES conversion of Jaleco's arcade game with a challenging difficulty level and imaginative enemy designs. The final two games on the collection are *Totally Rad*, an enjoyable adventure with a shape-shifting protagonist and some excellent looking bosses and *City Connection*, a great little conversion of Jaleco's entertaining arcade game.

Piko Interactive Collection 2 has a heavy sports theme, but there is still plenty of range across its 13 games. We've already mentioned *Football Madness* as it's a PlayStation release, but it's a pretty rubbish one, which is only really notable for having no rules and silly power-ups. The football theme continues with *World Trophy Soccer*, which is better than *Football Madness*, but lacks the pace of Jaleco's *Super Goal! 2*. *Soccer Kid* on the other hand is much better, mixing football and platforming with good results. *Summer Challenge* and *Winter Challenge* are up

»[Evercade] It's great to see coloured borders, but it's a shame they don't extend to in-game.

next and both are solid offerings with a good mix of events and, crucially, the ability to pass and play so multiple players can take turns.

Full Throttle: All-American Racing is a fun motorbike SNES racer, while *Hoops Shut Up And Jam 1* and *2* are retooled versions of *Barkley Shut Up And Jam!* without the licence. While not a patch on *NBA Jam*, they play a good game of basketball but feel very similar to each other.

More racing games exist in the form of the aforementioned *Racing Fever*, *Top Racer 2* and *Eliminator Boat Duel 2*. All three are great games, with *Top Racer 2* just clinching it due to the challenging AI. That just leaves *Power Football* and *Beast Ball*, which are both fun takes on American football.

The more we played *Piko 2*, the more we felt it's been released too early. There's such a focus on multiplayer that it simply feels that you're not getting anywhere near as much fun out of it as you will once the Evercade VS releases, meaning you may want to hold off buying it until then. It's hard to ignore the cheap price of entry, though.

In a nutshell

While Piko's collection disappoints due to its multiplayer focus, *Jaleco Collection 1* is highly recommended and another essential addition to your Evercade library.

»[Evercade] Two near similar basketball games feels a little wasteful. *Hoops 2* remains good fun, mind.

»[Evercade] *Football Madness* is terrible, although some of the power-ups are unintentionally hilarious.

>> Score **85%**

>> Score **70%**

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

PICK OF THE MONTH

Pac-Man 99

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** Free (in-app purchases)

The biggest criticism we can level at Arika's new game is that while it's instantly obvious what you need to do at a base level, there are no rules to explain *Pac-Man 99*'s many new mechanics. Ultimately you're chomping away at pellets and avoiding ghosts, just like any other *Pac-Man* game, but things change when you munch a Power Pellet. Any ghosts eaten will become a 'Jammer Pac-Man' and be sent over to any player you've targeted and slow them down, hopefully allowing them to be caught by a ghost and knocking them out of the competition for good.

Additionally you can enhance Pac-Man so that he becomes stronger or faster when you finally munch a Power Pellet (careful, it doesn't last as long, though). You can also pick up sleeping ghosts which will trail behind an existing ghost so that you can munch them all at a later time and hopefully overwhelm your hapless target. Fruit exists too and can be used to reset the maze and add new sleeping ghosts. *Pac-Man 99* is an incredibly deep and complex game but none of it is explained, meaning it can be a little difficult to work out how you need to improve. Improve you will though, because it has an alluring quality to it and in this respect it reminds us of Arika's *Tetris 99*.

While the core game is free a number of additional modes are locked behind a paywall along with a large number of skins, many of which are based on other classic Namco hits. Blind Time Attack has you trying to clear the entire maze against a strict time limit, while Score Attack has you frantically trying to outscore your opponents. The last mode, CPU Battle, is perhaps the most interesting as it uses AI opponents and ensures you'll be able to continue enjoying this unique *Pac-Man* experience long after the servers have shut down. It's a little convoluted at first, but when *Pac-Man 99* clicks it's as good as *Tetris 99* and becomes incredibly hard to put down.

» Score **88%**

»[Switch] Jammer Pac-Men will disappear if you munch a Power Pellet, while eating a fruit will make red Pac-Men die.

»[Switch] Make a train of ghosts long enough and your poor opponent will really struggle to escape them.

RetroMania Wrestling

» **System:** PC (tested), Switch, Xbox One, PS4
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £23.79

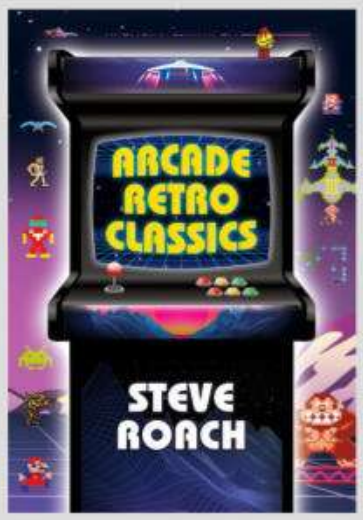
Retrosoft has delivered something of a dream 16-bit wrestling game. The excellent art is clearly inspired by the likes of *WWF Wrestlefest*, with plenty of cool arenas to fight in and some excellent ring entrances. Meanwhile, the neat grappling system takes cues from *Fire Pro Wrestling*, with a momentum gauge so you can build up to the big moves. There are even a few different match types to indulge in, including cage matches and multi-man scraps. However, the price is perhaps a tad high for what's on offer. Single players get a story mode starring Johnny Retro and the arcade-style 10 Pounds Of Gold mode, both of which are fun but brief, and there are only 16 wrestlers on the roster. It should shine as a multiplayer brawler, though.

NICK THORPE

» Score **79%**

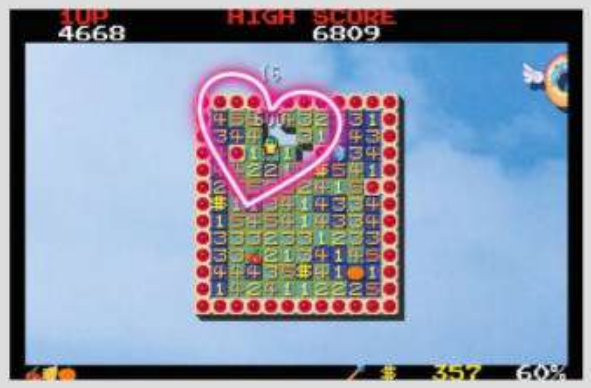
Arcade Retro Classics

» **Buy it from:** amazon.co.uk
» **Buy it for:** £18.99



Hot on the heels of *Coin-Op: The Arcade Guide* comes another book dedicated to arcade classics. Steve Roach's new tome will disappoint those looking for new insight or interviews, but works brilliantly as a simple time machine. The majority of the book focuses on the Eighties and 1990, covering 87 arcade greats, including *Centipede*, *Mr Do!*, *Bomb Jack* and *Zaxxon*, but it also celebrates the likes of *Space Invaders*, *Street Fighter II* and even *Crazy Taxi*. Steve also explains how to enjoy these games on modern systems and even briefly discusses the touchy subject of ROMs and how to jailbreak your console. It's all finished off with some slick design work and lots of lovely images and is a decent alternative to Darren Doyle's *Coin-Op* book.

DARRAN JONES



Alice And You In The Planet Of Numbers

» **System:** PC » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £5.19

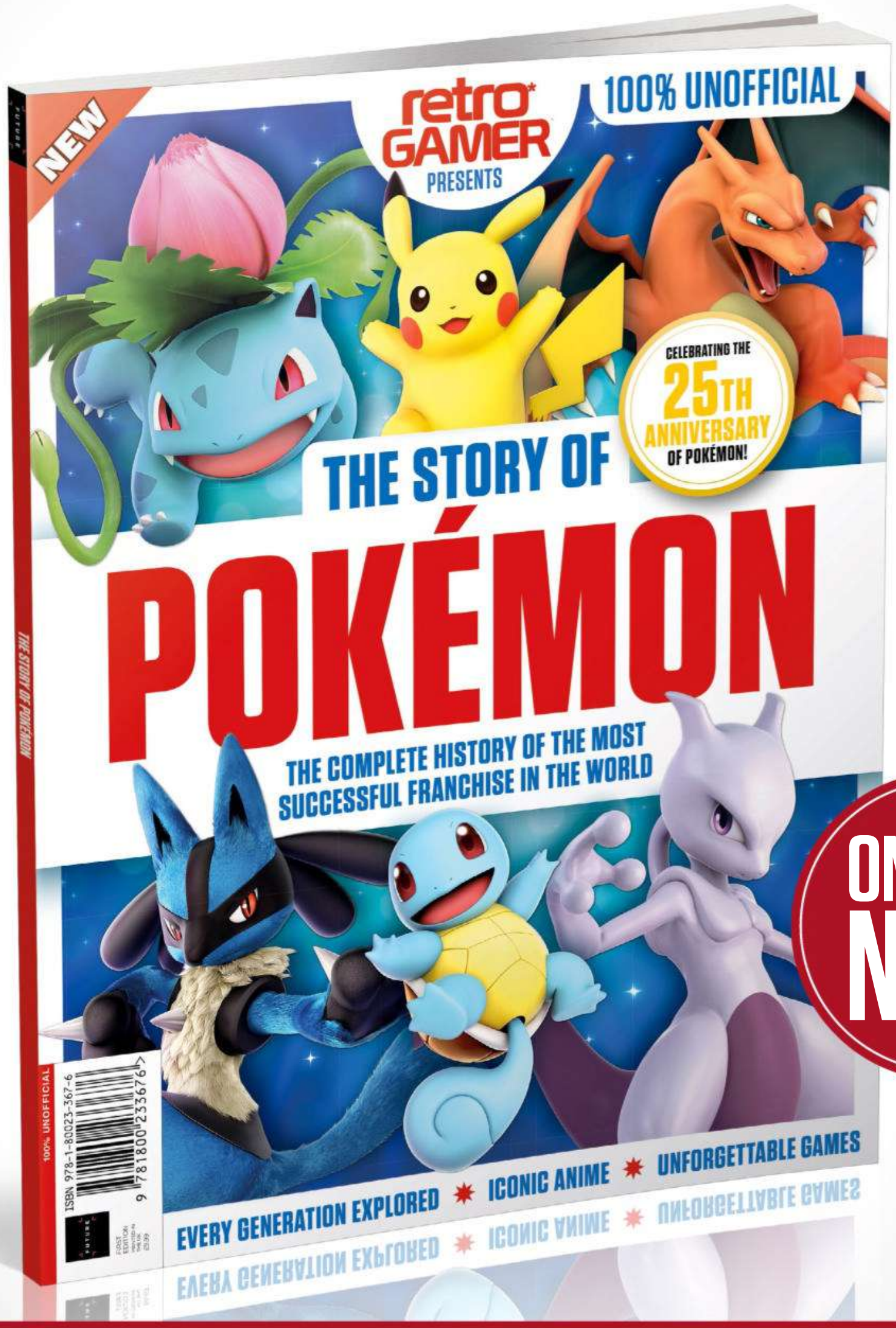
While it might look complex, *Alice And You* is exactly what a puzzle game should be – easy to pick up, but hard to master. You're placed in a grid of numbers, and the goal is to walk over every tile. However, your character can only walk as many spaces as the number on the tile in the direction they're trying to move. Tiles disappear as you walk over them but can be replaced by picking up hearts, and trying to reach that next heart can get very tricky as you try not to overshoot or cross over your own path. With two game modes and a variety of grid sizes, the difficulty matches your patience too.

NICK THORPE

» Score **87%**

A WORLD OF DREAMS AND ADVENTURES WITH POKÉMON AWAITS. LET'S GO!

Embark on a journey from the very first generation of Pokémon, all the way to the eighth. On the way, you'll delve deep into the stories behind the videogames, television series and more. Get ready to catch 'em all!



ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

SONY'S DIGITAL STORE CLOSURES

How will they affect collectors in the future?

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

While we were putting this issue together, Sony announced that it was going to close the PSP, PS3 and Vita stores – only to reverse its decision on the PS3 and Vita. We talk over the implications of that, and other related issues, for collecting these platforms in the future.

NICK
So before the shutdown was announced, when was the last time you actually used the PS3 or Vita digital stores?

DARRAN
Controversial! For me it was probably to review a Vita game for the reviews section. Of course, that changed when I heard all the stores were disappearing!

NICK
I claimed a copy of a Vita game that I'd backed on Kickstarter last year. For PS3, it would have been around the time *Yakuza 5* came out.

TIM
I've never actually used either, as I've not had a Sony console since the PS2. I did buy *Bloodborne* on an ex's PS4, but we split up before I finished it.

NICK
So with the older consoles, would it be fair to say that we were probably more concerned about keeping what we'd got rather than buying new things? The Vita, I think, is a different story.

DARRAN
I think the PSP isn't going to be too much of a loss, as I don't feel it had many exclusives that were digital only. PSPgo users are going to be largely buggered, though. I'll also miss the Minis. I've already bought some US credit in order to buy certain PS3 store exclusives like *Battle Princess Of Arcadias* and *Black Knight Sword*, but a bigger concern is the current loss of patch information on certain games.

TIM
So everything you buy will be the day one release without patches added on?

NICK
Yeah, that's right. So you'll always have the broken version of *Skyrim*, or the dodgy aiming in *Uncharted 3*.

DARRAN
Which is why I've been seeking out the Game Of The Year versions of these titles, just in case the patches never come back.

NICK
I can only imagine they're going to get quite expensive. Some of the physical versions of primarily digital games, like *Best Of The PlayStation Network Volume 1*, are already there. I paid €30 for that, and you can't get it for under £100 at the moment.

DARRAN
I've always seen GOTY editions as a cynical way of getting more money from fans, but they're going to be quite desirable once the system's servers do shut down.

TIM
That'll push the prices up.

DARRAN
I think we've already started seeing it with a few titles, Tim. Vita prices have gone insane lately. *Persona 4 Golden* is now over £130!

NICK
How much does the digital version go for? Can't be even a quarter of that, surely?

DARRAN
It's apparently £8.99, which is a huge difference. While it's great that the PS3 and Vita stores are no longer closing as originally intended (for the time being at least) I'm now concerned about this CMOS battery news that's recently come to light.

» [PSP] Sony's first handheld has few true digital exclusives, but *LocoRoco Midnight Carnival* is one of them.

» [Vita] Nick claimed his copy of *Root Double* last year, and you could tell it was him before you read this.

TIM
CMOS battery news?

NICK
So basically, the PS3, PS4 and PS5 all require time to be validated for certain things to work properly. If the battery that keeps that information dies, and the network is no longer available to validate the time, they stop working. For PS3 that's digital games, and for PS4 and PS5 it's everything – digital games, disc games, the works.

DARRAN
So does that mean Sony's consoles from PS3 forward are going to be rubbish to seek out from a collector's viewpoint? It certainly sounds like it.

NICK
It could do, but there will almost certainly be workarounds – as we've seen for things like the suicide batteries in CPS2 arcade boards. They probably won't be any worse to collect for than computers like the Amiga, where half the original disks are dead at this point. It's just a shame that we'll probably have to rely on piracy and hacking to ensure that the games remain accessible and the hardware remains functional.

DARRAN
For me, the recent scare of the stores shutting down continues to highlight to me why physical will always be my preferred way of owning games. I was thinking of grabbing some PS1 games as their digital versions are so much cheaper, but it sounds like my PS3 is basically a ticking time bomb.

Follow us online so that you can join in the discussions

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

» An image from happier days, before the PSPgo became a mildly attractive paperweight.

TIM
I'm glad I don't have to worry about this stuff. You've been having a bit of a nightmare trying to get stuff downloaded before it disappears, right Darran?

DARRAN
That's right. I was working out where to find codes for the US and Japanese stores, cross-referencing prices to find out which regions had the best deal and was also trying to restore my old US account with absolutely no success, so I've already lost around 30 games.

NICK
I was mainly on the 360 for that generation, so the PS3 stuff hasn't been so much of an issue for me. But it has made me reconsider whether I want to buy a PS5, or maybe switch to Xbox Series X.

DARRAN
Well it acts as a cautionary tale if nothing else and proves the importance of collecting physical media. Maybe I should just discard it all and become a nomadic gamer like Tim? I could travel to new consoles and rinse them of free games and not worry about whether my machine is even going to work in a decade's time.

TIM
Join me, it's less cluttered.

NICK
You could do that, but I think we all know it's slightly more likely that you'll become the king of a newly independent Bournemouth.

DARRAN
Ha! I do like lording it up over all of you!

» [PS3] *The House Of The Dead 4* has no physical release, and it's the only home version available. Boo!

» [PS3] If patches become unavailable, the lengthy loading problems in *Bayonetta* could once again plague players.

» [PS3] If you want *Tokyo Jungle* on disc, in English, the price skyrocketed after the store closure announcement.

» [Xbox] Tim has access to Xbox and Xbox 360 games on his Xbox One, but only plays them when they're on Games Pass.

READERS REACT

Which games are you grabbing before they disappear?

Justin
I got *Double Dragon Neon*, *Prince Of Persia Classic*, *Rain* and *Hydrophobia*.

Richard Stone
I tried to grab *Jeanne D'Arc*, but unfortunately it's not there anymore. I'll probably get *Front Mission 3*, *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Persona*, but quite a few things have already vanished.

Paulie 'Walnuts' Gualtieri
I was gonna download *Klonoa* (PlayStation) but it already disappeared... Downloaded *Blood Omen: Legacy Of Kain* thankfully. I know, not digital exclusives but physical copies of those two are slight bank breakers.

Alex Clogston
I grabbed *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles* and *Persona 3 Portable*.

Jamie Robinson
I'll try and get as many PlayStation classics as I can before the store closes.

Fritz T Montecristo
Ever since the announcement I grabbed *Gottlieb Pinball Classics*, *Greed Corp*, *Rain* and the original *Tomb Raider*. I also grabbed a bunch of DLC for *Final Fantasy XIII-2* and *Lightning Returns* (which I got recently). I think that's everything I need...

Max T Witter
For PSP a number of Japanese PS1 releases, which I will grab for Vita and PS TV as well. For PS3 I really wanted the digital *OutRun 2* version, but missed that at the time...

Cass Tritton
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles and *Dark Side Chronicles* for me.

Gareth Qually
Only items I can't get elsewhere. *Rain* looks like a must buy.

Agus Susanto
Mine are *1942: Joint Strike*, *Rocket Knight*, *Front Mission 3*, *Asura's Wrath*, *Ratchet Deadlocked*, *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair*.

Darren Talbott
Motorstorm RC is a top-down racing game and is digital only on PS3 and Vita cross buy. I got it from PS Plus free monthly games many years back but went on to buy all the DLC. Highly recommended for anyone that hasn't got it, great fun and very addictive.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

CLAIRE AND CHRIS STATUES
"Paid £50 for the pair – had never even heard of them!"
PAID: £50

WILLIAM BIRKIN G2
"A steal, considering it goes for £500 today."
PAID: £70

RESIDENT EVIL 2
"Me and my friend couldn't beat train Birkin so we had his older brother beat it for us. When we finally beat the game we yelled so loud, his stepdad rushed up the stairs and thought one us had been murdered!"
PAID: £0

BIO

NAME:
Scott Pearce

LOCATION:
Errol

FAVOURITE GAME:
Resident Evil Remake (2002)

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Sega Saturn

COLLECTION WORTH:
£3,000

INSTAGRAM:
scottpearce198

THE ZOMBIE ZEALOT

What Resident Evil memorabilia is in Scott's item box?

For 34-year-old Scott Pearce, there's one famous videogame series that has dominated his collecting habits over the last few years. "My first encounter with *Resident Evil* was at a friend's house," he tells us. "We piled in to play it on the PlayStation during July 1998 – a spooky coincidence as it's the same timeframe as when the game itself is set!" Like with many fans, *Resident Evil* opened up a new world to Scott with its survival horror theme, skilfully staged encounters and intense action scenes. "It was the feeling of impending doom and dread that hooked me at first and the brilliant use of fixed camera angles to obscure the threat. Plus the gameplay is just so addictive; punishing at first, then rewarding and satisfying when you finally master it."

Today, Scott still enjoys playing the original games, although his favourite is the 2002 GameCube *Resident Evil Remake*. "Those tank controls were purposely hampering, probably because of the limitations of the controller, and also because it makes the game far scarier," he notes. "Also, not being like a ninja and more like a real person fits the tone better – I speedrun the games these days, so don't mind them one bit." Scott is also a fan of the recent reimagining, *Resident Evil 7*. "I love it – it was a nod to the Seventies slasher flicks, but still retained the charm of the series. Plus Lucas was a proper scumbag, a perfect villain."

But we're getting carried away with the *Resident Evil* chat here – it's the marvellous *Resident Evil* collection that Scott owns that we're supposed to be talking about. "The series' popularity in Japan probably drives the abundance of merchandise in a small way," explains Scott, "as they seem to love their trinkets. There are capsule machines in every store." These little vending machines that pepper shops in Japan often contain figures and other smaller items from the games, making them a treasure trove for any fan of the series, or gaming loot in general.

As you can see from the pictures, there's quite a range of impressive items in Scott's collection, from replica guns to ornate statues and, of course, the games themselves. Due to the franchise's popularity, much of the merch goes for a high price, so we ask Scott, if money was no object, what would he buy for his collection? "Definitely the *Code Veronica* Dreamcast – it was a Japanese exclusive but it's gorgeous with its red shell and matching controller."

Scott's love of *Resident Evil* culminated recently (May 2019) in a trip to Osaka, Japan – home of Capcom headquarters. "It was a ten-minute walk from our hotel, and while we weren't allowed past the foyer, it was still amazing to be there." Undeterred, Scott and his wife explored more. "We went round the back of the HQ and a bunch of devs were on their smoke break," he grins. "They were probably taking a well-earned breather from working on the *Resident Evil 3* remake!"

TANAKA WORKS MAGNUM
"Saw it back in the day on a collector's website and always wanted it. A steal at £235."
PAID: £235

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE

"I bought this back in 2002 and the memory of taking my GameCube and new game on the bus to my dad's still holds a place in my heart."

PAID: £40

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

LEON'S MAGNUM GUN

■ "I remember saving up for it in 2015. My girlfriend – now wife – had no interest in the games but she could tell by my child-like enthusiasm that it was important to me. She said 'Woah, that's cool!'"

PAID: £235

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

R-TYPE FINAL

This fantastic update of the arcade classic was a PlayStation 2 exclusive upon its original release back in 2003, yet it is still unlikely to set you back much more than **£12,** even complete and in mint condition. After the Japanese import? That'll cost you more, with prices varying between **£30** and **£40.** Whichever you go for, it's a bargain for this brilliant game.

NFL 2K

Sega's answer to EA's legendary *Madden* series is an excellent game and cheaply available, albeit in NTSC format only. Even a sealed copy recently sold for just **£5** on eBay.

POWER STONE

While not exactly rare, this Dreamcast beat-'em-up will set you back around **£15-£29** in good condition which is at least a lot cheaper than its sequel. The Japanese version rarely tops **£15.**

X-MEN LEGENDS

Released across the Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube, even the latter version rarely spikes above **£5** on eBay. Looking to slash that price even more? You should probably have a stab at the Xbox version which Music Magpie sells for a cut-price **£3.33.** We love Wolverine.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

Huge sales of Epyx's spy caper means that prices today remain low, even for mint boxed copies. In its fragile card box iteration, the C64 game can often set you back **£10-£15** while the Spectrum conversion is probably the cheapest in its standard double jewel case. A loose Atari 7800 cart sits with a boxed Master System *Impossible Mission* at around **£8-£10.**

DONKEY KONG JR

Popularity and enthusiasm for all things Nintendo continues to drive up the prices of its most well-known IP, especially when boxed. For a loose cart of the classic game you're probably looking at spending **£15-£20** with a boxed and complete *DKJ* costing between **£32-£50,** depending on condition.

BALANCE OF POWER

Chris Crawford's game is a strategy classic, imbued with Cold War tension and political machination. Copies aren't often seen from UK sellers, but are common enough Stateside. Not common enough to be cheap, however; for the 1985 original release, expect to pay **£50-£80** for a boxed copy. The later editions tend to be around half that price.

HOW MUCH?!

MARIO KART 64

Considering it's such a common Nintendo 64 game, the recent sale of an NTSC copy of *Mario Kart 64* raised a few eyebrows at **Retro Gamer**. Sure, it's boxed and complete, but the final auction price of **£117,** spread over 11 bidders with 26 bids between them, is about **£40-£50** more than we'd expect it to go for. For comparison, Darran paid **£24** for a copy last year.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

SWITCHED ON

Discover why Darran is obsessed with Nintendo's Switch

If you needed further proof of the popularity of Nintendo's latest console consider our *Greatest Games Systems* feature from issue 177. Nintendo's console was already being championed by readers as the 30th greatest machine of all time and it had only been on sale for about ten months (by comparison its predecessor, the Wii U, didn't even place).

The Switch certainly isn't perfect (its third-party games can often suffer from performance issues compared to the Xbox and PS4 versions) but there's certainly a lot to be said for its sheer versatility and adaptability (it's equally at home in your hands or under your TV). That adaptability, both in how it can be used and the sheer range of games that's available for it, has ensured Nintendo's console currently gets more play than anything else I own.

Whenever I've purchased a console in the past, I've always made my decision not based on publisher loyalty, but on whether the system had games I wanted to play. That's why I chose a Lynx over a Game Boy, a Master System over a NES and Sega's Saturn over Sony's PlayStation. The Switch is no different, and while many of the games I own are also available on other consoles, Nintendo's personal output convinced me to take the plunge.

For me, *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild* and *Super Mario Odyssey* redefined their respective genres and they came out within seven months of each other. That's an impressive result for any system, let alone one that had been out for less than a year. I've been less impressed with Nintendo's insistence on re-releasing many of its previous Wii U games at full price, but there's no denying the quality of the games in question, and many include extras like with the recently released *Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury*. In short, if you enjoy Nintendo games the Switch is pretty much a no-brainer.

Another reason I love the Switch is because it's a great system to collect for. When the PS Vita was in vogue, Limited Run Games had great success releasing digital games in physical form for the console (I'll cover my Vita collection soon) but the release of the Switch has seen this niche market explode and now it seems like a new company is appearing every month with the aim of selling you interesting releases for the system. Limited Run Games still leads the way, with nearly 90 published games for the Switch and that doesn't even include the variants it publishes for the likes of Marvelous, Dotemu and Idea Factory, but others exist too, including Super Rare Games, Special Reserve Games, Strictly Limited Games, Play Asia and numerous others. It has led to healthy competition and has also led to me discovering a large number of independent games (particularly Metroidvanias) that would have otherwise passed me by, including *Timespinner*, *Snake Pass* and *My Friend Pedro*.

Aside from discovering new indie gems on Nintendo's hybrid console, I've also found myself buying a lot more import games than usual. In the past you'd typically import games because they simply weren't available to play in your own country. That still happens today of course, but nowadays many publishers are content to simply release digital copies of their games, or worse, they release physical boxes with a simple downloadable code inside. That's great for those that just want to play the game, but not so good for collector's like myself.

Fortunately, companies like Capcom, Square Enix and Namco do regularly sell physical versions of their games overseas and as a result I own Japanese or US versions of *Capcom Belt Collection*, *Okami HD*, *Taiko No Tatsujin: Rhythmic Adventure Pack* and *Senran Kagura Peach Ball*, along with countless others. It's not all rosy however and because companies love to save money, trilogies that only receive the first game on the cart and the rest as a downloadable code are becoming more and more popular, so keep that in mind.

Nintendo's console is also becoming quite the haven for my favourite genre – the shoot-'em-up. The Switch has a healthy selection of great shooters available, from M2's *Aleste Collection* and *ESP Ra De Psi* to the two excellent *Psikyo* collections from NIS America Europe, but they're just scratching the surface, particularly if you do start examining the many retro releases available digitally. Hamster has added the likes of *X-Multiply*, *Vulcan Venture* and *Image Fight* to its *Arcade Archives* range, and has also released numerous Neo Geo shooters, including *Blazing Star*, *Pulstar* and *Prehistoric Isle 2*, while a number of great shooters are found on the *Sega Ages* range.

Retro compilations and remakes in general are also abundant on Switch, which is another reason why it has become such a desirable console for me. It may be a modern system, but its games span generations and it's been fantastic having so many classic games and franchises I love in one place, from compilations covering virtually all the *Darius* games, to a nearly complete library of Neo Geo releases and the many NES and SNES games available via Nintendo's own online service. So the next time you look at Nintendo's console and decide it's not for you, take another look at it, you may be pleasantly surprised. Nintendo's Switch feels like the last great bastion for physical games and I intend to support it for as long as possible.

WHY I SWITCHED

FIVES REASONS I ENJOY NINTENDO'S CONSOLE

SHMUPS

The Switch has everything, from hectic arena shooters to bullet hell extravaganzas. If you don't mind digital releases the net opens even wider.

NINTENDO GEMS

Yes there are a lot of recycled Wii U games (many of which are brilliant) but there are also excellent exclusives like *Arms*, *Cadence Of Hyrule* and *Astral Chain* to discover.

RETRO GOODNESS

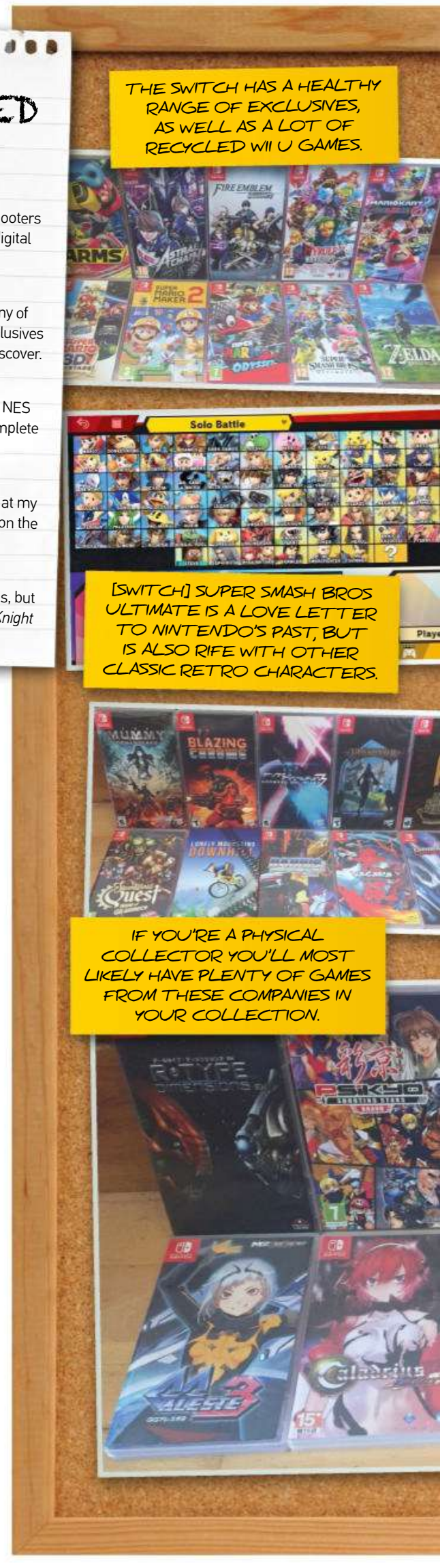
The Switch has an insane amount of retro, from NES and SNES classics to compilations and a near complete collection of Neo Geo games.

VERSATILITY

The hybrid nature of the Switch means it's always at my side ready to play. I can then continue my gaming on the big TV in the evening.

METROIDVANIAS

This genre is supported across all modern systems, but only Switch allows me to play games like *Hollow Knight* and the *Ori* titles while tucked up in bed.


THE SWITCH HAS A HEALTHY RANGE OF EXCLUSIVES, AS WELL AS A LOT OF RECYCLED WII U GAMES.
[SWITCH] SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE IS A LOVE LETTER TO NINTENDO'S PAST, BUT IS ALSO RIFE WITH OTHER CLASSIC RETRO CHARACTERS.
IF YOU'RE A PHYSICAL COLLECTOR YOU'LL MOST LIKELY HAVE PLENTY OF GAMES FROM THESE COMPANIES IN YOUR COLLECTION.

POWER
Color
ATHENA
TIME
AKARI
OPTION
B
A
2
3
THEY ALL EXIST ON THE EUROPEAN STORE, BUT IF YOU WANT PHYSICAL COPIES YOU'LL HAVE TO LOOK OVERSEAS FOR THEM.
[SWITCH] NEO GEO POCKET COLOR SELECTION VOL 1 AND CAPCOM ARCADE STADIUM ARE GREAT EXCLUSIVES AND WORTH SEEKING OUT.
TOP 1UP
34100
INSERT COIN
PAN
WHILE MANY OF THE SWITCH'S GAMES ARE AVAILABLE ON OTHER SYSTEMS, THE SECONDARY MARKET SEEMS FAR MORE ROBUST, MEANING A BETTER RETURN IF YOU DECIDE TO SELL ON.
[SWITCH] HAMSTER'S RANGE OF ARCADE RELEASES NUMBERS OVER 240 AND INCLUDES CLASSICS FROM NINTENDO, KONAMI, JALECO AND SNK.
THE FLIP GRIP IS A FANTASTIC DEVICE IF YOU ENJOY PLAYING VERTICAL SHMUPS OR PINBALL GAMES.
JURASSIC PARK
SHOOT-'EM-UPS ARE THRIVING ON NINTENDO'S SWITCH. THIS IS JUST A TINY SELECTION THAT I OWN.

ONE OF US, ONE OF US

Readers reveal why they enjoy Nintendo's console

Robert Annett
The Switch is a great way to play old NES and SNES games, including some only released in Japan. The rewind facility is also very useful on some of the harder releases.

Fat Bot
It's currently my most-played system. I like the fact that I can play it anywhere. Great original and retro games, though they need to add more NES and SNES titles. Having to replace Joy-Cons really stuck in my craw, though. I rarely replace controllers, especially after two years of normal use.

Jason
I got myself a Lite and a full and love them both. Having retro classics, indies, and Nintendo first-party games is great. But it also seems to be the home for point-and-click games old and new. And as a genre poorly represented these days, having them on Switch makes it a must own.

RetroPassionUK
I love the *Mario* games and the SNES back catalogue, it's the perfect nostalgia trip from Nintendo.

David Sheppard
It got me back into console gaming after a ten-year hiatus, where I didn't have time to commit to games outside of the odd PC game or retro itch session. The sheer variety of games available and the portability makes it my favourite console for a very, very long time.

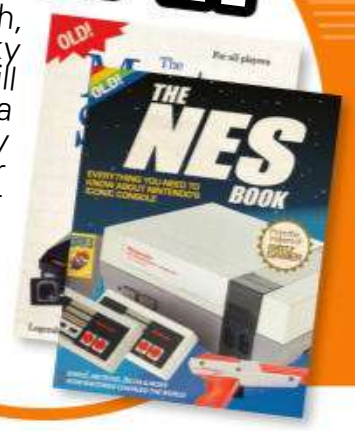
Skyblaze the Kittyblob
I got a Switch just before I had to have major abdominal surgery. The console saved my sanity during my stay in hospital and prolonged recovery period. Great games, and such versatility in being able to be used portably.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

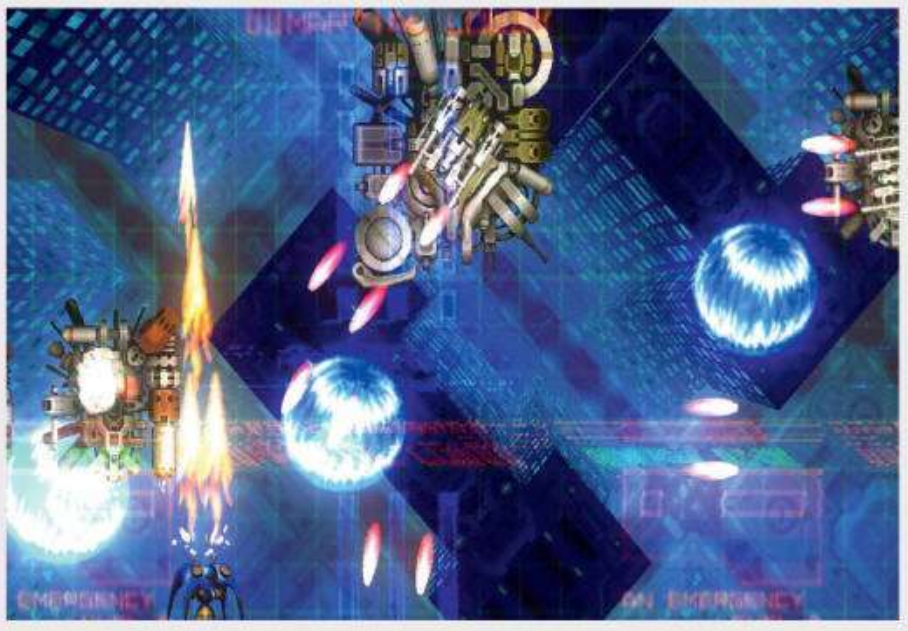
DEAD GOOD DIGITAL DEALS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Congratulations on an excellent magazine and keeping it packed with quality content throughout the past year. What I normally like most about your articles is when you have pictures of concept art or other artefacts like the Oliver Twins' tapes and disks they dug out for the *Ghostbusters II* piece. I say normally because the Treasure feature topped it this month with the reminders that I can buy *Guardian Heroes* and *Radiant Silvergun* from the Microsoft store and play them on my Xbox One. Otherwise I'd have assumed they were out of my reach.

I'd love to see more information on where you can legally buy the games being featured and perhaps an opinion on which is the best version out there, eg Switch, SNES Mini. Or even a feature on where to find those otherwise expensive classic games, a focus on the Wii U Virtual Console selection would be timely as I think Nintendo will shut that down soon.
James Short

Thanks for the kind words, James – we're glad you're enjoying the magazine, and really glad to hear that you've managed to get yourself those Treasure classics.

It's funny that you should bring up the idea of a feature using digital stores to pick up expensive classic games for a fraction of their usual cost, as we've recently had our minds focused by Sony's announcement of digital store closures. Even though the PS3 and Vita have since had their store closures postponed, it feels like we're about to lose affordable access to plenty of classics, because we're also convinced that the Wii U's digital offerings are not long for this world. We'll look into doing this one as soon as possible, in order to maximise the amount of time that readers have to grab those sought-after bargains.



» [Xbox 360] You too can own *Radiant Silvergun* for a sensible price – and even play it on modern hardware!

» [Vita] Visual novels like *Steins;Gate* really appeal to Nick, and not just because of the CRT love.

NOVEL IDEA

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Ever since the release of the PS Vita (and now the Nintendo Switch) I've been enjoying visual novels and was wondering if **RG** had ever done a feature on this genre? I have no idea of the origins of visual novels and just how far back gamers in the UK were able to enjoy them. I don't recall seeing them on my glorious ZX Spectrum back in the Eighties, although that was a lifetime ago, so I might've forgotten!
Joel Weaver

We haven't done a feature on visual novels yet, though Nick is a fan of the genre – as well as the recent Future Classic on *428: Shibuya Scramble*, he'll happily play through the likes of *Steins;Gate*. We'll likely do this in the future, but as a lot of the genre's formative works are in Japanese and have yet to be translated, we're making sure that we have the proper knowledge before we delve into it.

MOBILE MAYHEM

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
As a new reader of the magazine can I thank you for producing a quality read each month which brings back many happy memories.

I thoroughly enjoyed the recent Nineties feature as this was when I spent the most time playing videogames, and also an issue where I noticed a few feature suggestions in the letters page so I wondered if I may suggest my own. I apologise if this is something you have already done. Forgive me, again I'm a new reader!

Another feature I recently enjoyed was the one about retro games on mobile phones and I've recently discovered the *Demolition Derby 2* and *3* games on my Android which, as the name suggests, are very similar to the *Destruction Derby* games which actually inspired me to buy a PlayStation on its release date.

The Nineties feature made me wonder if there are more games from that era which now have similar versions available as games for your mobile, and I wondered if there might be mileage in a feature where you could highlight a modern mobile phone game which is based closely on something considered a retro game?

Thank you again for all your hard work and efforts, especially during this difficult time. I hope you know how appreciated it is.
Michael Coventry

Welcome aboard Michael, we're happy to have you as a new reader. There are quite a few mobile tributes to classic games – Nick's particularly partial to *Assault Chaingun KM*, which draws inspiration from Sega's arcade game *GunBlade NY*. This could make for a good feature, so we'll look into this area and see what we find.

JOY OF DISCOVERY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've been thinking about sending a mail in for some time, but with so many subjects to cover I could never decide what about until now. I have only been picking up your mag consistently for about the past year as with lockdown the choices of shops have been limited, I've always grabbed the odd issue that attracted me due to the cover or features but I have to say the thing that I have really enjoyed is having

»[Android] *Assault Chaingun KM* definitely has that signature Model 2 look about it.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag Retro Gamer Magazine @RetroGamerMag

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [Saturn] Charlie likes Sonic and the Saturn, so can almost certainly feel the sunshine of Sonic R.

a focus for my retro interests. The internet is great and there is so much resource and information it can sometimes be too much to look through, so my monthly retro update has been a great resource to further my hobby and, more importantly, provide info and news and features on systems and games I usually wouldn't be looking at.

I'm a big Sega guy and have just finished flicking through the Nintendo Archives from the latest issue and am now looking at N64 consoles on eBay! Keep up the good work and articles and who knows, I may even get a GameCube!

Paul Adams

Hi Paul. As much as we love a good bit of nostalgia, we really enjoy discovering new favourites from older systems, so it's great to hear that the magazine is letting you discover things you haven't experienced before. Enjoy that N64!

CHILD OF THE CLASSICS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Hello my name is Charlie and I'm 12. I have been reading your magazines for two years. I got into retro gaming when my dad bought me a Sega Genesis 3 and I've never stopped collecting ever since. My favourite videogame character is Sonic The Hedgehog and my favourite game console is the Sega Saturn followed closely by the Game Gear (which I have both). I love all your magazines and they have shown so many new games that I had never seen before.

Charlie Everitt

Thanks for reading, Charlie! With the Saturn and Sonic as favourites, you have Nick's stamp of approval. We hope you enjoy retro gaming for a long time to come.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Hardware health

We've been preoccupied with keeping our consoles in working order this month – partially because we learned about the potential for bricked PlayStation hardware if CMOS batteries fail (see Hot Topic for more), but also because Nick's Dreamcast decided to crap out and start resetting while he was streaming *Sonic Adventure*.

» Paul's readership of **Retro Gamer** likely results in this. We'd apologise, but he'll have loads of fun.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite memory of the R-Type games?

One Credit Classics

Beating *R-Type* was a massive turning point for me as a person. After I got that clear and we beat it without dying, absolutely ANYTHING seemed possible. What an amazing and truly timeless shooter. All time great.

Steve Hardy

I always remember that brief panic when the first level boss broke from its restraints and started moving towards you.

Brian Faneuff

I never got the chance to experience the full arcade glory of it, but I fondly remember receiving *R-Type DX* for the GBC for Christmas as a kid, which I sunk countless hours into.

Jason Edmunds

Spending way too much time playing it at Dayville's in Birmingham and then reading about it coming to the new PC Engine consoles which were due out, to then spending an absolute fortune on getting one on import as I loved it so much. I still have it in my collection all these years later as well.

Lightfoot Bros

Still blown away by the ZX Spectrum version. What a conversion! To pack that into the humble Speccy. Special mentions to Sega Master System and PC Engine versions too.

Ash Sloan

Seeing level three's mothership for the first time and realising the boss *was* the level. There really was nothing like that in the world of arcade shmups at the time.

Ronnie Young

My memory of *R-Type* is simple. Anger. Anger at how absolutely terrible I was at the game. Having revisited on MiSTer I can confirm that I am still terrible at it.

Craig Taylor

R-Type III on the SNES blew me away. The music was amazing, I can still hear it now. Loved that game!

Picoter8

R-Type blew me away when I played it at the arcades as a kid in the Eighties. Creepy music, the elegant art style, it has everything I love about sci-fi in a single cohesive package.

retro GAMER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor **Darran 'Thunder Force III' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
0330 3906443
Art Editor **Andy 'Hellfire' Salter**
Production Editor **Tim 'Blood Money' Empey**
Features Editor **Nick 'Border Down' Thorpe**
Photographer **Phil 'Gradius' Barker**
Group Art Director **Woz 'R-Type' Brown**
Editorial Director **Tony 'Juno First' Mott**

Contributors

Writing Daryl Baxter, Martyn Carroll, David Crookes, Paul Drury, Iain Lee, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne, Lewis Packwood, Aaron Potter, Paul Rose, John Szczepaniak, Alan Wen

Design Emma Wood

Advertising

Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Director **Tom Parkinson**
tom.parkinson@futurenet.com
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

International

Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the Licensing team to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com

Subscriptions

Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
Customer service phone line **0330 333 433**
New orders phone line **0330 333 1113**
Online orders **magazinesdirect.com**
Senior Marketing Manager **Tom Cooper**

Circulation

Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production

Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Advertising Production Coordinator **Emma Thomas**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Controller **Vivienne Calvert**

Management

Chief Content Officer **Angela O'Farrell**
Brand Director **Matthew Pierce**
Global Art Director **Rodney Dive**
Commercial Finance Director **Dan Jotcham**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

ISSN 1742-3155

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation

All contents © 2021 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Rachel Addison**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

ipso Regulated

Widely Recycled

DISCOVER THE UNIVERSE

www.spaceanswers.com

ALL-NEW AR EXPERIENCE INSIDE
CHINA'S NEW SPACE STATION
The orbiting outpost that's tipped to replace the ISS
HOW WE'LL DETECT A WORMHOLE
Could latest research help find portals through space?
All About Space
"I'M NOT CONVINCED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S EXCUSES"
BEN SMITH, FORMER CIA OPERATIVE
"THERE IS NO TERRESTRIAL ORIGIN"
LT COL KEVIN D. RANDLE, US ARMY RESERVE
THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ROSWELL FILES
HOW INVESTIGATIONS BY A FORMER CIA OPERATIVE DISPROVE THE FLYING SAUCER CONSPIRACY THEORY
+ RARE SUPERNOVA
FUTURE OF LUNAR SPACECRAFT
MYSTERY SOLVED
WEIRD SIGNAL AT SATURN
PERSEVERANCE UPDATE
NEW PHOTOS FROM MARS
ALL-NEW AR EXPERIENCE INSIDE
CAN WE STOP CLIMATE CHANGE?
SPECIAL REPORT
WATER ON THE MOON
HOLE IN TH
UNIVER
WHAT LURKS WITHIN THE MOST M
PLACE IN THE COSMOS?
MAKE A DISCOVERY
SPACE PROJECTS TO TRY AT HOME
+ 'OUMUAMUA'S ORIGIN · BUZZ ALDRIN'S NEW SPACECRAFT
All About Space
SPACE WARS
IS PLANET EARTH READY FOR A COSMIC BATTLEGROUND?
SIGNAL FROM PROXIMA CENTAURI
CHANCES OF BEING KILLED BY A METEORITE
UNISTELLAR EVSCOPE
DARK ENERGY
STARGAZING TONIGHT! ASTRONOMY WITHOUT A TELESCOPE

AVAILABLE FROM ALL GOOD NEWSAGENTS AND SUPERMARKETS

NEW ISSUE ON SALE NOW!

Print and digital subscriptions available at

www.magazinesdirect.com/know3for3

/AllAboutSpaceMagazine @spaceanswers space@spaceanswers.com

>>LOAD 221

nextmonth

ON SALE 10 JUNE 2021

SONIC TURNS 30!

WE BREAK DOWN SONIC'S DEFINING QUALITIES WITH HELP FROM SONIC TEAM

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 30th ANNIVERSARY

AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING...

Spy VS Spy, Violet Berlin, They Stole A Million, Shantae, Audacity Games, Battle Axe, Pico-8, So You Want To Collect... MSX Games, Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons, Tiger R-Zone, Vagrant Story

ENDGAME

OSHIDASHI ZINTRICK: PUKIE'S ENDING

» There was a game made by ADK for the Neo Geo in 1996, which is now quite a rare and pricey thing to find, but is well worth looking for if you get the chance because it's really brilliant. But enough about *Twinkle Star Sprites* – ADK's puzzler *Zintrick* is all of that, except not really as brilliant. Oh well, maybe there's something funny at the end? Let's skip ahead and find out.

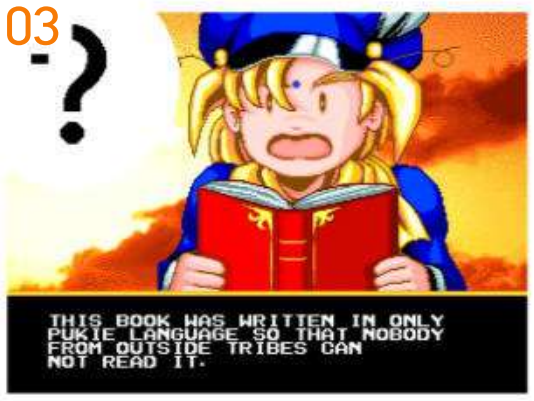
01

» Achieving fame via success at puzzle games is no easy feat, but Pukie's got a plan. After winning at Zintrick a whole lot, he has written an autobiography – a noble endeavour, but a risky one. Who's going to read it?

02

» As it turns out, pretty much the entire Pukie tribe. The book goes on to achieve massive success, in exactly the same way that Nick's book *Why Nobody Will Play Puyo Puyo Tetris With Me* never did. Not that he's bitter.

03



» Unfortunately, Pukie's success comes to a grinding halt due to everyone's least favourite thing – a language barrier. Turns out nobody else can read the Pukie language, and human society isn't ready to learn it for the sake of a single book.

04

» And to be fair to the humans, lest we make them out to be wilfully ignorant buffoons, it seems like a pretty hard language to translate. "Pu pu pu" isn't exactly a lot to go on, even for the most experienced of linguistic scholars. Pukie's masterwork is simply beyond them.

05

» Fortunately, Pukie founded the Union of Unintelligible Puzzle Game Characters. Unfortunately, they're still struggling to gain recognition from the rest of the puzzle game world, because it seems that while Arle can translate for Carbuncle, Pukie is still not understood by either of them. Whoops.

PlayStation.

THE BEST GIFT IDEA FOR GAMERS

There's something for everyone on PlayStation™Store:

Games | Add-ons | Movies
Subscriptions | And more!

PlayStation Store

Browse and discover thousands of games, add-ons, subscriptions and much more

PlayStation Plus

PlayStation®4 Online Multiplayer, two PlayStation®4 games every month, exclusive PlayStation™Store discounts and more

THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

©2020 Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe. "PlayStation", "PS4", "DUALSHOCK" and "PS" are registered trademarks of Sony Interactive Entertainment Inc. Also, "PS VITA", "PSN" and "PS" are trademarks of the same company. "SONY" and "PS" are registered trademarks of Sony Corporation. "Sony Entertainment Network" is a trademark of the same company. All titles, content, publisher names, trademarks, artwork and associated imagery are trademarks and/or copyright material of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

PlayStation®Plus subscription only available to Sony Entertainment Network (SEN) account holders with access to PlayStation™Store and high-speed internet (recommended min connection speed 5 Mbps). PlayStation™Network (PSN), PS Store and PS Plus subject to terms of use and country and language restrictions; PS Plus content and services vary by subscriber age. Users must be 7 years or older and users under 18 require parental consent, except that users in Germany must be 18 years or older. Service availability is not guaranteed. Online features of specific games may be withdrawn on reasonable notice – eu.playstation.com/gameservers. Approved payment method details required. PS Plus subscription is an ongoing subscription with a recurring subscription fee which is deducted from the user's wallet (at the current PS Store price). Full terms apply: PSN Terms of Service at eu.playstation.com/legal.

Available at: ASDA Save money. Live better. Sainsbury's WHSmith wilko Clintons cardfactory

Powered by: incomm

CHILLOUT GAMES

where gamers collect

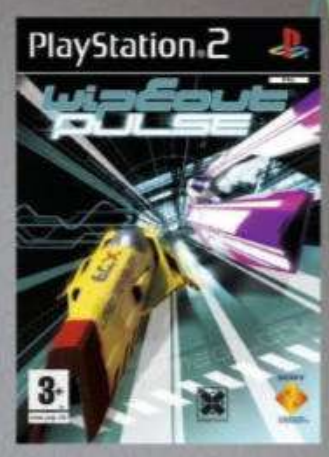
www.chilloutgames.co.uk/Sell

Trustpilot

We Pay £££ For Your Games:

£18.72

£12.23



£23.93

£24.57

£16.65

£12.92

£52.01

£64.83

£95.44

£43.95

£122.02

FREE PARCELFORCE DOORSTEP COLLECTION

FAST CONTACTLESS PAYMENT

Prices valid 10/05/21 and subject to change daily. Prices are for PayPal (Shop Credit add 12% more).
Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd.
Full terms & conditions can be found at at www.chilloutgames.co.uk